OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER™

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PITFALL!
DAVID CRANE ON THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 2600 CLASSIC

30 YEARS OF ROBOTRON
HOW EUGENE JARVIS' ICONIC SHOOTER DEFINED A GENRE

MAJOR HAVOC
REVISITING THE BATTLESTAR GALACTICA-INSPIRED CLASSIC

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THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE STREET FIGHTER



DARRAN JONES
Hugo for me. Many of his moves require nothing more than a quick 360 of the stick (known as the Darran Jones Factor whenever I use it in matches at work).
Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two gorgeous girls and an award-winning magazine
Currently playing:
Sleeping Dogs
Favourite game of all time:
Strider/Robotron: 2084



STUART HUNT
For me it has to be Ryu. I have no interesting reason why, he's just the character that I use the most.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently Playing:
Pitfall!
Favourite game of all time:
Pitfall!



CRAIG GRANNELL
Ryu, on the basis that he looks like a detailed version of the guys in *IK+*, which was the last fighting game I cared about.
Expertise:
Games that don't require 37 fingers to play
Currently playing:
Hero Academy
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



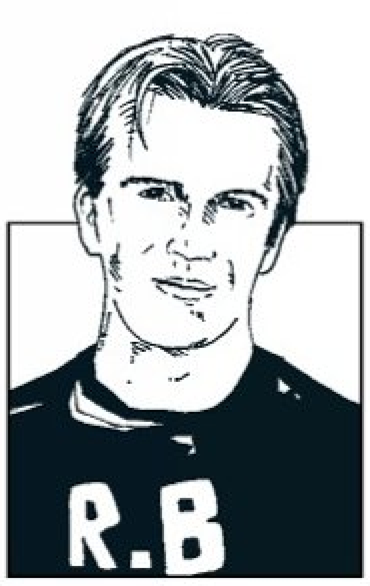
MARTYN CARROLL
Ryu. The original main man, and still the first character I choose when playing any *Street Fighter* or spin-off game.
Expertise:
Games you could POKE
Currently Playing:
New Super Mario Bros 2
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



DAVID CROOKES
Ken. Mainly because you have this lean, mean fighting machine with immense power and yet he sounds like Barbie's wet partner.
Expertise:
All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation.
Currently playing:
Flow (iPhone)
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



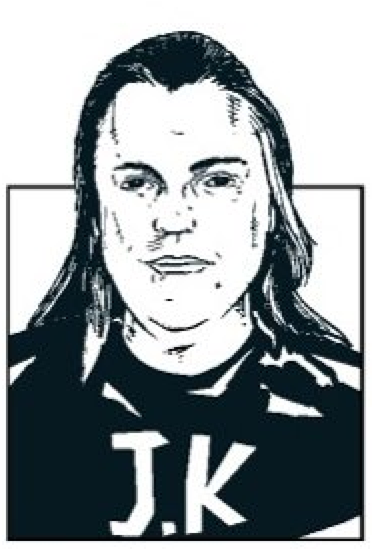
PAUL DRURY
Judge me all you like, but I'll still say Chun-Li. Ah, the thrill of pulling off a Spinning Bird Kick. Nice Arctic Monkeys' tune, too.
Expertise:
The fate of Psyclapse
Currently playing:
Jungler
Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



RICHARD BURTON
I'd go for Chun-Li. With her thighs of steel and Lightning Kick she helped many hapless *SF* gamers win without any thought or skill.
Expertise:
Stuff and nonsense
Currently playing:
Tubaruba
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner



PAUL DAVIES
Ryu, because he walks the path. I named my son after him.
Expertise:
Banging my head against a brick wall
Currently playing:
Gears Of War 3
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



JASON KELK
I was just a "button masher" so I tended to use Chun-Li for aesthetic reasons and because I seemed to randomly slap the right controls for moves more often than with the others!
Expertise:
Being a homebrew hero
Currently playing:
Joyride Turbo (XBLA)
Favourite game of all time:
Io

LOADING...



I've been playing *Robotron: 2084* on and off from pretty much the moment it was released. Standing on a bar stool in a local pub at the tender age of ten in order to play it (kids were allowed in pubs back then), I was completely mesmerised by the sheer brilliance of Eugene Jarvis and Larry DeMar's incredible shoot-'em-up.

Of course, back in the early Eighties, I never knew how iconic *Robotron* would go on to become, and I'm pretty sure nobody else did either. All I knew was that it was the most exciting game I'd ever played and that I couldn't feed ten pences into the coin slot quick enough.

Over the years I've flirted with many other shooters, but I've always returned for the quick fix that *Robotron* offers me. It's like a digital siren, tempting me in with its raucous effects and then spitting me out when I fail to once again get past Wave 10.

It's left its impact on others as well, and this month we've been lucky enough to speak to developers who have been inspired by Eugene's frenetically exciting shooter over the past three decades. We've also spoken to Eugene himself, and as usual he was full of fascinating anecdotes.

One day I'll own my own cabinet (it's my fortieth next year, Mel, if you're reading) and I'll finally be able to give up emulation for good. Until then I'll make do with my version on Xbox Live Arcade.

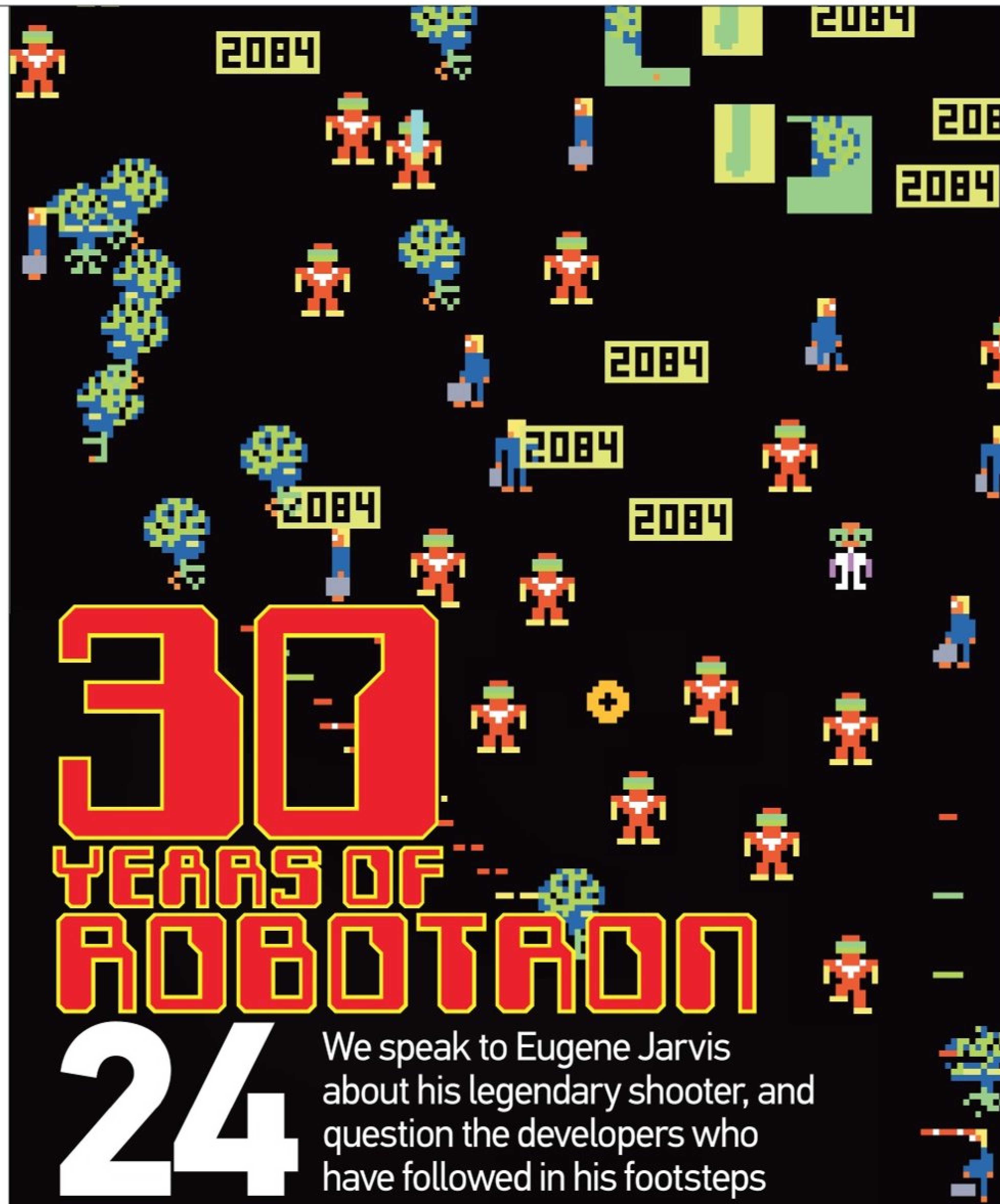
Enjoy the magazine,



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>> Load 107 Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED



30 YEARS OF ROBOTRON

RETRO REVIVALS

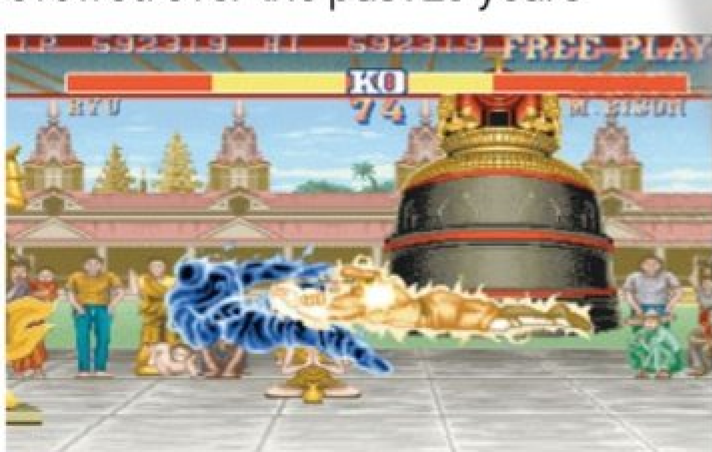
In the hot seat this month…





“Stylishly executed and smartly designed” Samuel Roberts

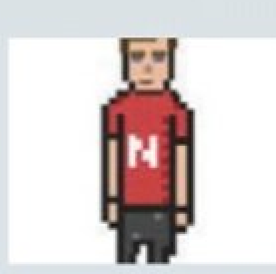








retroGAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL







ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED





retro radar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> It's nearly time for this year's Replay event, so we've spoken to one of the organisers to find out what's in store for us this year. We've also found out a little bit more on the brand new Neo Geo portable console that SNK Playmore will be releasing later in the year.

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» Previous Replay events have been a big success, which is why its organisers are planning to make this one bigger than before.

REPLAY IT AGAIN

REPLAY EXPO RETURNS, AND THIS YEAR IT'S BIGGER THAN EVER

Since its very first show two years ago, Replay Expo has attracted more than 7,000 gamers from around the world and is now one of the biggest independent UK annual videogame shows.

Why it enjoys such success is easy to see. It's organised by a passionate team that strives to do bigger and better every year, and it's the only UK gaming expo that caters for all aspects of videogames, with consoles, PC, mobile, pinball, classic and contemporary gaming all represented.

Moving from its previous home in Blackpool to a new, larger location in the form of EventCity in Manchester, this year is shaping up to be the biggest show ever. While classic gaming is still very much the order of the day, the newly rebranded Play Expo has now received a slight change to its usual format, one that will see it offer up a selection of four distinct events, each focused on a specific area of gaming.

The familiar retro gaming show is back as re.play, which will offer freeplay arcade and pinball machines, as well as a wide choice of classic computers and games consoles, and will be the place to hear from past developers and industry veterans. now.play will be showcasing more recent hardware, accessories and game releases. Competitive gamers will almost certainly want to pay a visit to pro.play, an eSports event featuring 'big money' competitions. And finally there's cos.play, a place to see and showcase costume-making skills and take in the many other features, events and talks that are planned for the weekend.

We caught up with director Gordon Sinclair to find out how this year's event is currently shaping up, how it will differ from previous years, and what visitors can expect to see.

Why move the event to Manchester this year?
We had a fantastic time in Blackpool and the place will always be close to our hearts. Unfortunately, the venue just wasn't big enough for our expansion plans. We carried out an extensive search for a new location all around the North West and the Midlands, but unanimously felt Manchester was the right place.

What retro speakers will be giving talks at the event?
A number of our talks have now been confirmed. Mike Montgomery, former MD of The Bitmap Brothers, will be sharing his memories of working with the legendary developers of classic titles such as the *Speedball* and *Xenon* series, *The Chaos Engine* and *Z*. Martin Edmondson, co-founder of developer Reflections will be talking about past and present projects – including his early Acorn days, through to *Shadow Of The Beast* on the Amiga, *Destruction Derby*, and his latest franchise, *Driver*. We will also have a worldwide exclusive preview of upcoming videogames documentary *From Bedroom To Billions*, with a Q&A session from filmmaker Anthony Caulfield.

Will there be a special guest presenter this year?
As the event this year is now basically four separate events in one, it wasn't really feasible to have a guest host





» The weekend promises something for everyone, from classic arcade and pinball machines to the latest consoles and games.



» From PS2 to CD32, the floor will be brimming with computers and consoles. You'll get to experience three decades of gaming in one place.

as they would need to be in four places at once.

What older machines can we expect to see at the event?
The re.play section of this year's show will be bigger than ever. The space dedicated to retro is far more than at previous shows and we are anticipating over 300 retro consoles and computers for you to enjoy. Pinball and arcade machines have been increased too. The classic arcade, provided by JAMMA+, will feature 75 arcade machines, all set to free play, letting visitors relive bygone memories on classics like *Pac-Man*, *Space Invaders*, *OutRun*, *Defender*, *Track & Field* and many more. Pinball fans will not be disappointed either, as we have increased the number of pinball tables on show by 50 per cent, meaning there will be an awesome 75 pins available this year – again, all set to free play.

Is there much support from publishers, like in past events?
We have secured some great titles and publishers for this year's event and we will be running a number of celebration zones that look at the rich history of some of these companies' best-loved franchises.

EA will be bringing two of their state-of-the-art trailers and will have *FIFA 13* and *Need For Speed: Most Wanted* as well as other unconfirmed titles. Namco will be bringing their latest *Tekken* game, *Tekken Tag Tournament 2*, which will form part of a *Tekken* celebration. For those who consider themselves pretty hot at *Tekken*, there is a chance to really prove it as we are hosting one of the official heats of the world *Tekken Tag Tournament 2* championships. Other publishers who have confirmed their attendance are legendary Japanese companies Konami and Nintendo. We are still in discussions with many other publishers too and are expecting to confirm more exhibitors and titles as we get closer to the show dates.

> **"We are anticipating over 300 retro consoles and computers for you to enjoy"**

Why are these events so popular?
I think it is for exactly the same reasons as why **Retro Gamer** is so popular: they both feed people's insatiable desire for nostalgia. But where reading a magazine is mostly a solitary activity, the events allow people to share their enjoyment with like-minded friends. We are actively encouraging gaming web forums to use the event as a meet-up opportunity for their community so that they can bring the forum out of the ether and into the real world. So we hope to meet lots of **Retro Gamer** forumites in Manchester! *

Play Expo is taking place across 13 and 14 October at EventCity in Manchester. Visit **www.replayevents.com** for updates.

Make sure you see…

» This year things are going down differently. Here's what you can expect at Replay Expo

re.play



The event that kicked everything off two years ago is where you can find and be reunited with all your favourite consoles, arcade machines and pinball cabinets from yesteryear. Visitors will be able to go hands-on with a veritable assortment of machines, from *Street Fighter II* to *Mr Do!*, and the extra space means more machines and more games.

now.play



Last year's expo received great support from game publishers and developers, with Nintendo, Team17 and Sumo Digital all showcasing upcoming projects. As a result of its success, this year has its own show dedicated to contemporary machines and the latest releases. EA will be showing off *FIFA 13*, and Namco Bandai will be offering *Tekken Tag Tournament 2*.

cos.play



Last year's cosplay competition drew attention due to the quality and diversity of the costumes, from Gordon Freeman and the obligatory Ms Crofts, to *No More Heroes*' Travis and screen icons like Marty McFly. As well as cosplay, this year will have new guest speakers, including Reflections' Martin Edmondson and The Bitmap Brothers' former MD, Mike Montgomery.

pro.play

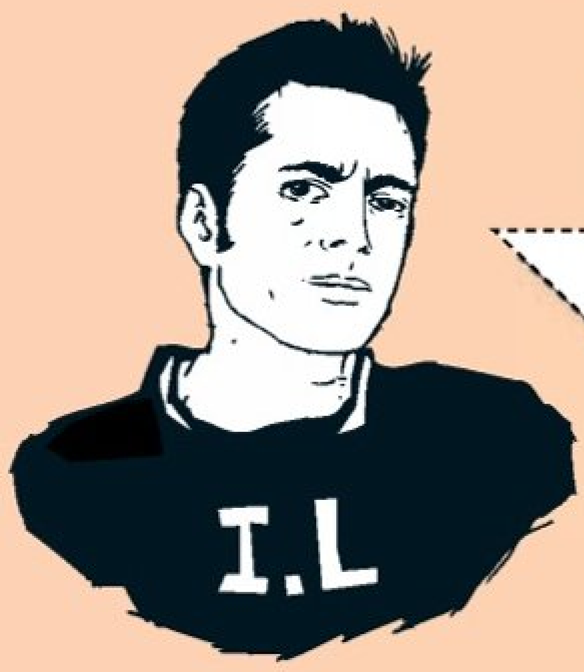


No expo is complete without a selection of gaming competitions for competitive players to demonstrate their skills. Previous Replay events have hosted tournaments on new and classic games like *Street Fighter IV*, *Pong* and *Warlords*, to name but a few, and this year many more are planned. There are some big cash prizes up for grabs too.

retrocolumns

» RETRO RECOLLECTIONS WITH CELEB IAIN LEE

Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *2 Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there, my name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro



Your Guide To Computer Game Shops Part 2



Last month I told you about some of my favourite shops that sold computer games when I were a lad working in t'mill. To be honest, I thought there wouldn't be too much to say on the subject but turns out I couldn't have been more wrongerer. If you remember, I only scratched the surface, touching briefly on Boots and WHSmith. It must be hard for the young gamer (does anyone under 36 read this page? No, thought not) to associate these now dull emporiums with videogame excitement, but trust me, they were the place to be. Providing you were 12…

I thought I'd write about a few more places that were significant to me, in the hope that I haven't actually dreamed this madness and some of you know will actually know what I'm talking about.

John Menzies was sort of like a poor man's Smiths. It was a little bit more than a newsagent, but not much. The only one near me was in Staines, a place we were fortunate not to visit too often. Even people from my home town of Slough looked down on Staines. You have to have a pecking order.

Named after Sir John Menzies, who invented pick 'n mix in 1868, this store had a tiny yet significant section. Significant in that it was the only time my fingers ever touched the hard, cold, dead keys of an Oric. It took me all of 12 seconds in Menzies to realise this machine was utter guff.

Then there was Rumbelows. Go and find a young person and tell them that in the olden days, people used to RENT TVs. And video recorders. Mental, right? I was renting a TV as late as 1997. Until my flatmates pissed me off and I cancelled the subscription without telling them. Boy, were they upset when they got home to find no TV that day.

You couldn't really play games in Rumbelows, but it's significant for me because it's where we went after my dad conned my uncle into buying an old Dragon 32 for £200 so we could buy a BBC. Boy, was he upset when he got home and found out it was rubbish.

I think the BBC was about £400 (that's £65,000 in today's money), so it was a huge decision and we spent several sessions in this TV rental place as the weary shop assistants slowly convinced my parents that the educational aspects meant this was the computer for them. We also got some vouchers for games, and the first game I bought was *Daredevil Dennis*. Unfortunately, this was the Acorn version, meaning the game was super fast and virtually unplayable.

Dixons deserves a brief nod, a shop you would only go to if all the other places were closed. They did have computers, but the staff wouldn't load up games for you. Being an uber-geek, I would happily write quizzes on the BBC and then hide and watch as other customers played them; I thought I was dead clever because I knew IF… THEN and A$ commands.

Please feel free to write to me at tell me at iain@iainlee.com about any games stores you love or loved. I may include them in a later piece.



It took me all of 12 seconds in Menzies to realise that the Oric was utter guff





NEO GEO RETURNS

SNK PLAYMORE REBOOTS CONSOLE FOR A NEW GENERATION OF GAMERS

Several months back, we reported on news of a new Neo Geo handheld. We've now got a lot more information on it and it sounds interesting to say the least.

The NeoGeo X Gold will be released later this year and will cost $199.99. It seems a hefty amount of cash, particularly as it comes pre-loaded with only 20 games, but the handheld offers a number of features.

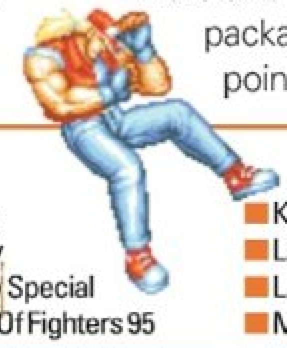
The most notable is that it comes with a miniature version of the original AES console, as well as a replica of the iconic joystick. The console is actually a docking bay for the tiny handheld, while the joystick (and a handy HDMI port) allows the console to be linked up to a television, thereby acting as a surrogate proper console.

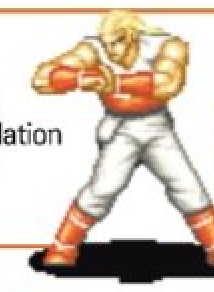
Designed by Tommo and distributed in Europe by Blaze, the NeoGeo X Gold is certainly an intriguing prospect, particularly if the expandable card slot included with it enables owners to import ROMS as past Mega Drive devices have allowed. We're also waiting to see if the emulation is the same quality with features in the excellent Neo Geo Station ports on PSN. Tommo's CEO Jonathan Wan is confident of the machine's appeal revealing that: "Great game consoles don't die; they're just reborn in much more affordable and convenient packages." And from a game point of view the included titles are solid rather than spectacular. *Metal Slug, Last Resort, Fatal Fury Special, Nam-1975, Samurai Shodown II, Baseball Stars II* and *The King Of Fighters 95* are the most obvious games, but it's worth noting that these titles have been released many times in the past and at a far cheaper price than the current asking price.

Of course, if there are ways of adding more games, via downloading or other means, it could still become a worthy alternative for those who can't afford the high prices that authentic Neo Geo cartridges can still sell for.

Needless to say, we'll have a lot more information and hopefully a review of the intriguing device in the very next issue. *

Included Games



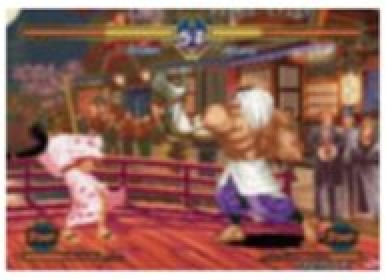


- 3 Count Bout
- Art Of Fighting II
- Alpha Mission II
- Baseball Stars II
- Cyber Lip
- Fatal Fury
- Fatal Fury Special
- The King Of Fighters 95
- King Of The Monsters
- Last Resort
- League Bowling
- Magician Lord
- Metal Slug
- Mutation Nation
- Nam-1975
- Puzzled
- Real Bout – Fatal Fury Special
- Samurai Shodown II
- Super Sidekicks
- World Heroes Perfect

Release these next OTHER NEO GEO GAMES WE'D LIKE TO SEE



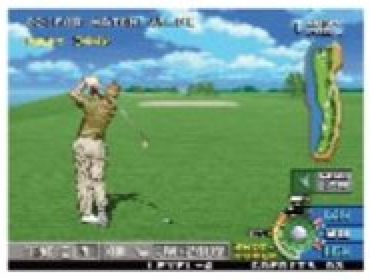
Blazing Star
After playing this recently on iOS, we've realised that it needs to be on SNK Playmore's brand new console. It's an incredible *R-Type* clone that simply gets better with age.



The Last Blade
Forget *Samurai Shodown*, this is our favourite weapon-based Neo Geo fighter. Atmospheric sound and gorgeous animation make it a must play for anyone serious about fighting games.



Neo Drift Out
This is a superb little rally game that never gets the love it deserves. Clever tracks and great use of sprite scaling gives it plenty of 'Just one more go' replay value. We'd definitely purchase this.



Neo Turfmasters
There aren't many truly great sports games on the AES, but this is certainly one of them. There are only four courses, but they're incredibly well designed and offer plenty of replay value.

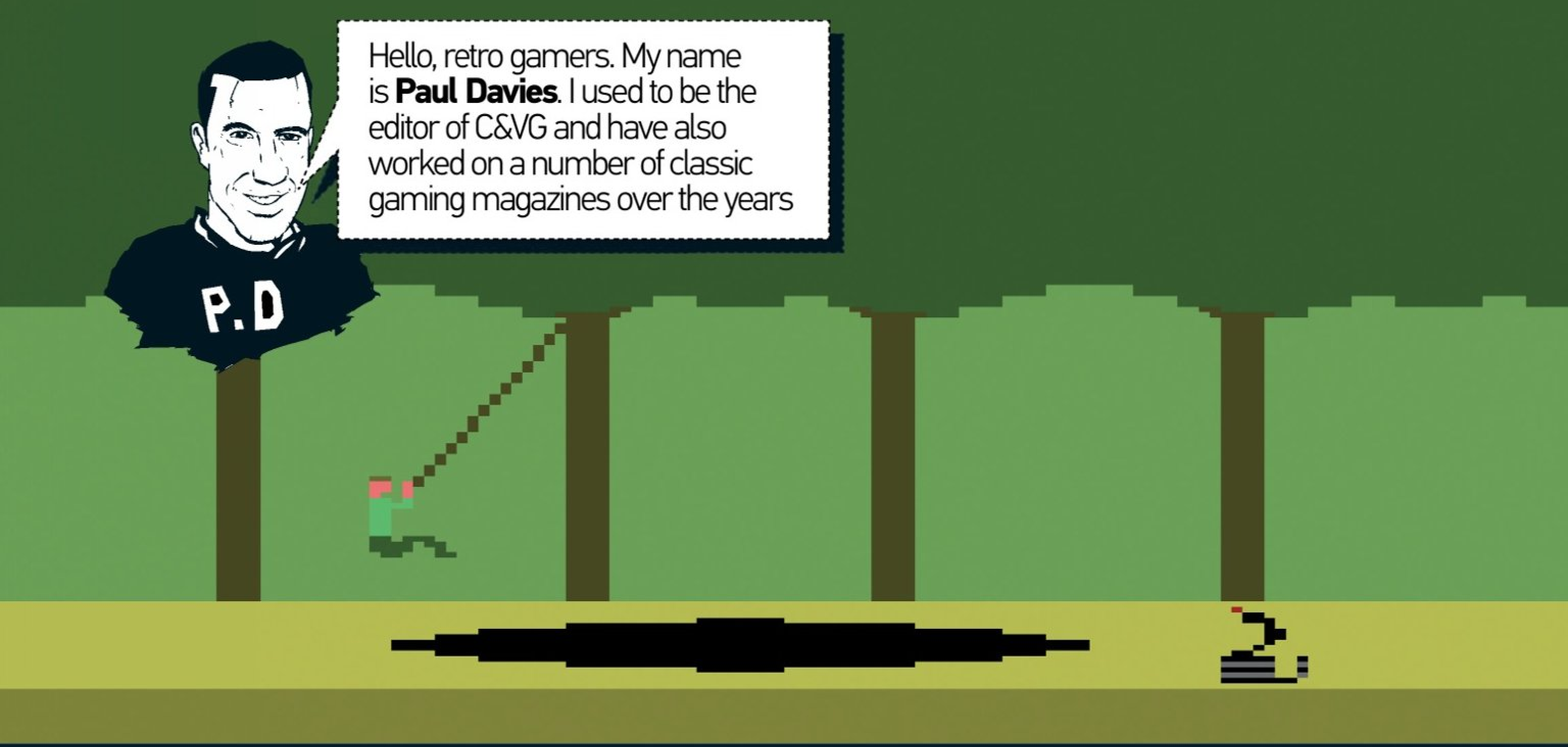


Garou: Mark Of The Wolves
Garou is easily the best fighter on AES. Stunning animation, superb combat mechanics and beautifully balanced fighters make *Garou* one of the best 2D beat-'em-ups ever.

retrocolumns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio…
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



The Oldest Swinger

"It's amazing," or words to that effect is how my friend introduced me to *Pitfall!* on the Atari VCS. I just took his word for it then watched him fail to clear the first ditch. 'See, it's amazing!'

12 years later, which felt like a lifetime, I am working for *Official Nintendo Magazine* and Activision is showing me *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure* for Super NES. They have huge expectations for the game, and the PR girl is very attractive. 'We think it's amazing,' or words to that effect, she says.

Both games were sort of amazing but, as I recall, kind of fussy. The original had a cool name, which might've started out as 'Fall into a Pit' before marketing got hold of it. You knew what was in store. Similarly Activision might've easily called *The Mayan Adventure* just *Pitfall With Better Graphics And Trees,* because that's basically what it was. Too many trees for my liking, some you could climb, others you couldn't, didn't make sense, I was confused. So was everyone else, hence 7/10-ish. I haven't seen *Pitfall: The Big Adventure* for Wii, but I'm sure it's amazing.

The very weird thing about *Pitfall!* is that it is a legend, and considered to be amazing, but doesn't seem to have found the same handholds and footholds that have helped the likes of *Pac-Man* and *Space Invaders* climb from obscurity. Could *Pitfall!* become something 21st Century awesome?

If I were Activision, which I'm not, hence holes in my shirts and shoes (and I'm not kidding), I'd take it down the *Tomb Raider/ Uncharted* route. In fact, *Uncharted* is *Pitfall!* by any other name. The thing to remember though with a new *Pitfall!* would be that the whole expedition should feel precarious; you really can fall, and the higher you climb the riskier it should get. Some oldschool kicks to the teeth.

> Activision might've easily called The Mayan Adventure just Pitfall With Better Graphics And Trees

I've been thinking a lot lately about how much of our entertainment has been dumbed down over the centuries. Music used to be more hands-on and skill-oriented, combined with a curriculum to make mathematics seem tame. Plus singing in front of other people! Theatre has devolved too, from Shakespeare to, basically, naughty Muppets in *Avenue Q*.

Audiences are growing however in those areas, whereas in console gaming we seem to be reaching stagnation point. As I said last month, games are becoming such a daunting challenge to the average guy that they're being left to the connoisseurs. It's great that games are becoming so involved, just look at the popularity of *Mass Effect* and *Skyrim* in particular. But it's telling that the simple stuff, much of which wouldn't have made a Master System break a sweat, is what people now love on iOS, etc. It's like we need a gaming education before enjoying the latest thing. No harm in that I suppose, but not helping.

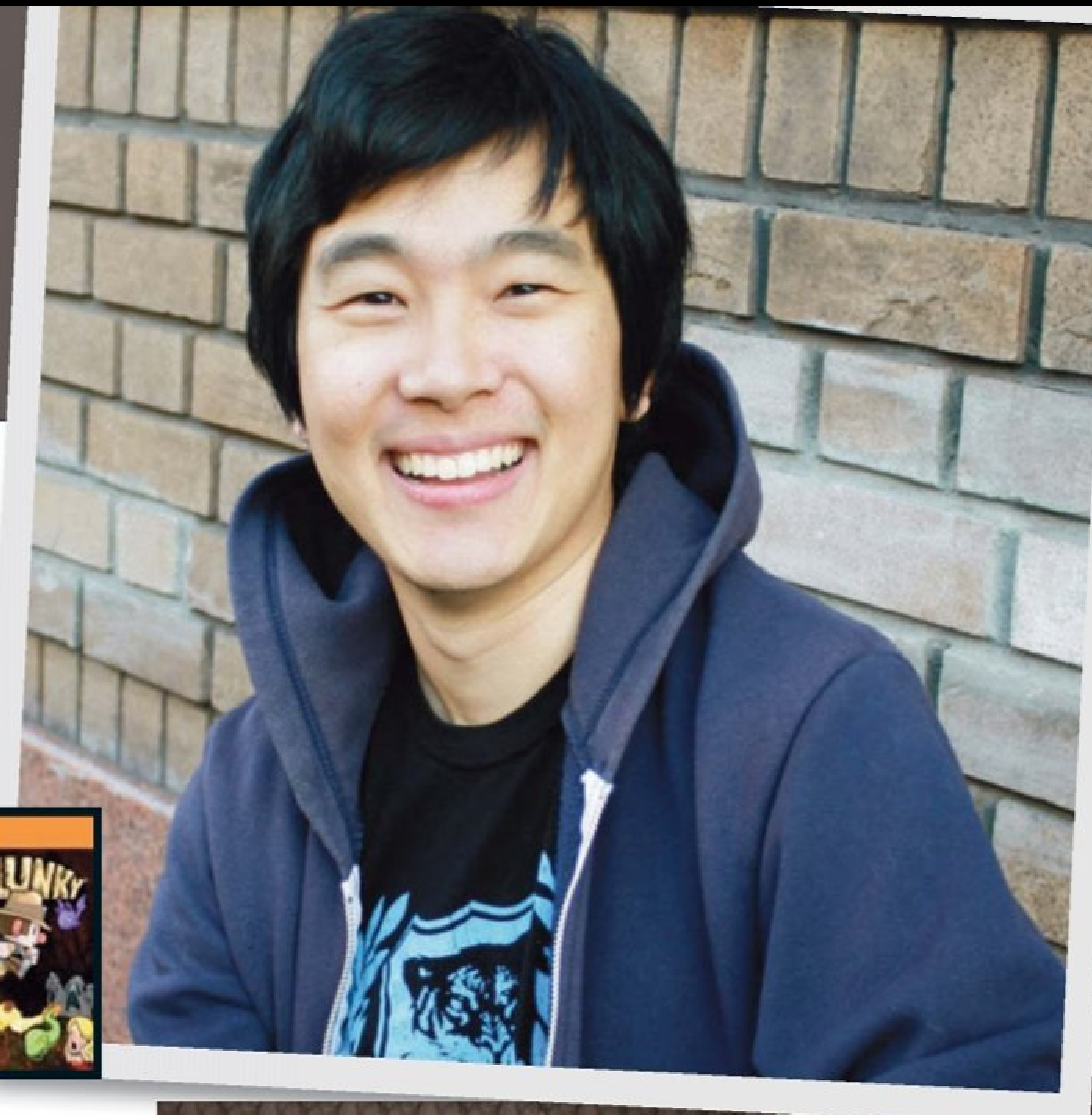
So maybe the best thing to do for Activision with *Pitfall!* is trim it right down to a one-button *Doodle Jump*-type challenge. Something you can play with one hand while drinking a latte with the other, and not minding too much if your pain au chocolat drops flaky bits onto the screen. I do think that the *30th Anniversary Edition* looks amazing on iPhone and iPad, however.

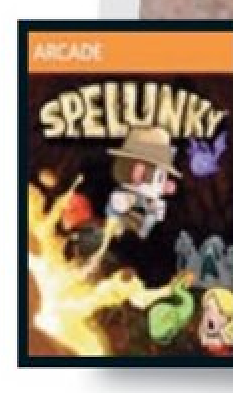
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>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD

*A MOMENT WITH...

Derek Yu





Every issue, we put an industry veteran in the hotseat. This month, Retro Gamer talks to Derek Yu, an independent games developer who draws much inspiration from the Eighties

Who is Derek Yu?

Born in 1980, Yu had a childhood typical of many of our readers. *He-Man* and Nintendo combined to have a major influence on the work he would later go on to produce as an illustrator, comic book artist and video game designer. Having created such gems as the 2002 PC platformer *Eternal Daughter*, the impact of the NES has hardly left him since. His latest game, *Spelunky*, is based on the 1983 *Pitfall!*-esque classic *Spelunker* which was released for the NES and a host of other consoles. *Spelunky* was launched on the PC four years ago but it's now been converted for Xbox Live Arcade and Derek was more than happy to chat about it.

Where did the original concept for *Spelunky* come from?
I was working on some simple platformer and roguelike prototypes when it occurred to me that a randomised platformer might be fun.

Why did you decide to have the levels in *Spelunky* randomly generated?
Everyone loves a good platformer, but playing the same levels over and over again can get tiresome even if they're imaginative and well-designed. My hope with *Spelunky* was that I could generate levels that were interesting enough to keep people playing over and over again, excited to see something new each time.

How difficult was it to achieve this balance of interest and difficulty when you first made the game?
It actually wasn't too difficult. My level generation algorithm is pretty simple and once I got it working the rest of the ideas fell into place.

How did you come up with *Spelunky*'s many imaginative deaths?
They're inspired by real-life monsters and traps, classic adventure tales like *Indiana Jones*, mythology, and, of course, videogames.

How much play testing went into tweaking Spelunky's difficulty?
Between myself and all the other players who died in *Spelunky*, I'd say it's been well-tested.

You're obviously a fan of old games, what is it you like about them?
I like that old games tend to treat discovery as a sacred part of play. A lot of modern games simply don't respect that enough, and they seem more concerned about making you comfortable. If you're stuck or frustrated for even a few minutes it's considered a bad thing. "You seem to be having trouble with this area. Would you like to select a lower difficulty?" But really, comfort is the last thing I want out of a videogame.

What involvement did you have with *Spelunky*'s excellent soundtrack?
Almost nothing, except for providing a little direction. The original game's soundtrack was composed by George Buzinkai and my friend Jon Perry. The XBLA soundtrack was composed by Eirik Suhrke.

Why did you drop the awesome C64-style visuals for the new Xbox Live version?
Mostly I just wanted to try my painted art style, which I felt matched the changes to the game. I feel like it still captures the spirit of the original pixel art, however.



» [XBLA] Although the game was released four years ago, the Xbox Live Arcade version has new graphics, music, zones, monsters, items, traps, and secrets.

What were the biggest challenges you faced when converting the game to Xbox Live?
Even with the basic concept left largely untouched it was still a monstrous amount of work for three people. We were quite meticulous about the many new details. It's much more than a port of the original.

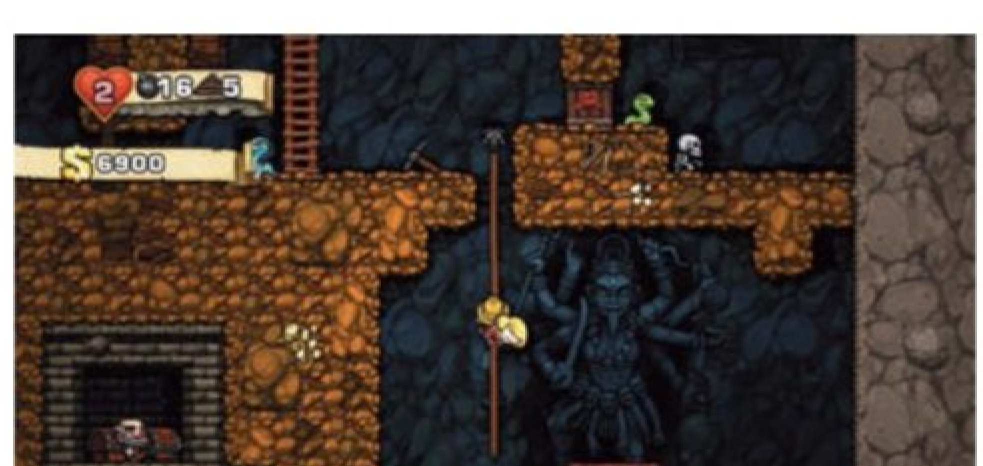
And what do you feel the new multiplayer mode adds to the game?
Spelunky turned out to be quite a humorous game, with players getting a big kick out of all the crazy ways that you could die and so on. They loved sharing their stories with people online, so how much better does it get if you add one, two, or three people adventuring together? Well, quite a lot! Throw in the frantic Deathmatch Mode, and you get a lot of different ways to experience *Spelunky*'s unique brand of fast-paced, randomised fun.

Have you been surprised by *Spelunky*'s continuing success?
Yes. I never imagined that little freeware game would come such a long way. I'm very proud of it and extremely grateful to everyone who helped me take it this far.

And finally, can you tell us anything about your next project?
I'm nurturing a number of freeware games at the moment. Going back to pixel art. That's all I can say for now!

» [XBLA] Although the game looks similar to Core Design's *Rick Dangerous*, Yu says he has only ever seen videos of it.





» [XBLA] Rather than have the same levels over and over again, *Spelunky* randomly generates the layouts each time.

14 September – 10 October

retrodiary

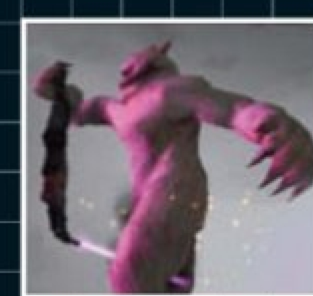
>> A month of retro events both past and present



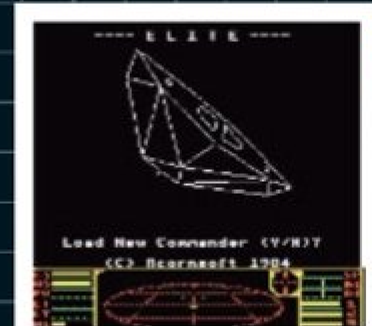
14 September 2007
■ Square Enix's real-time strategy RPG game *Heroes Of Mana* arrives on the Nintendo DS.



14 September 2012
■ Thirteen years after the original, the European release of Namco's *Tekken Tag Tournament 2* on PS3 and Xbox 360 is due.



17 September 2003
■ *Star Wars Jedi Knight: Jedi Academy* is released worldwide by LucasArts on PC. Ootini!



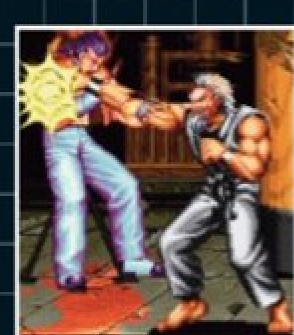
20 September 1984
■ Acornsoft releases David Braben's and Ian Bell's classic *Elite* on BBC Micro and Acorn Electron.



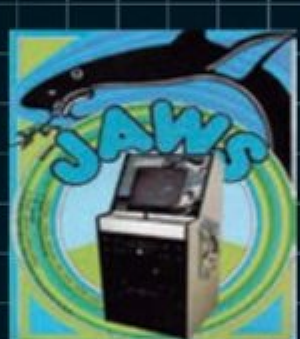
20 September 1986
■ Sega-AM2 unveils its latest coin-op offering, *Enduro Racer*, complete with a full-size dirt bike arcade cabinet.



22 September 1997
■ *PaRappa the Rapper*, the rhythm-based videogame, was released on the PS1 across Europe. I gotta believe!



24 September 1992
■ SNK releases the enjoyable beat-em-up *Art Of Fighting* in the arcades of Japan.



25 September 1975
■ Atari jumps on the *Jaws* movie bandwagon with an unlicensed coin-op called *Shark Jaws*.



26 September 1991
■ *Solar Jetman: Hunt For The Golden Warpship*, developed by Rare and released by Nintendo arrives.



27 September 2005
■ **Retro Gamer**'s original publisher, Live Publishing, goes bankrupt, leaving issue 19 in limbo…

28 September 2005
■ Taito Corporation becomes a subsidiary of Square Enix after its $409 million takeover is completed.



29 September 1995
■ Sony's original PlayStation console is released across Europe. Nine and a half years later, the PS1 had sold a massive 100 million units worldwide.



30 September 1997
■ Interplay's open world role-playing game, *Fallout*, is released on PC. A year later, *Fallout 2* arrives.



30 September 2005
■ *Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks* is published by Midway Games for the PlayStation 2.

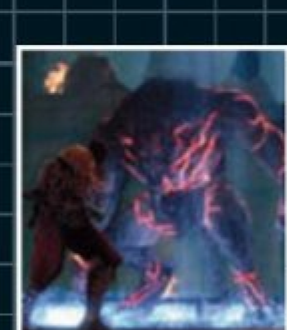


1 October 2004
■ *Myst IV: Revelation* is released by Ubisoft on PC and Mac in the UK.



2 October 2012
■ Capcom's survival horror franchise continues with *Resident Evil 6* on PS3 and Xbox 360.

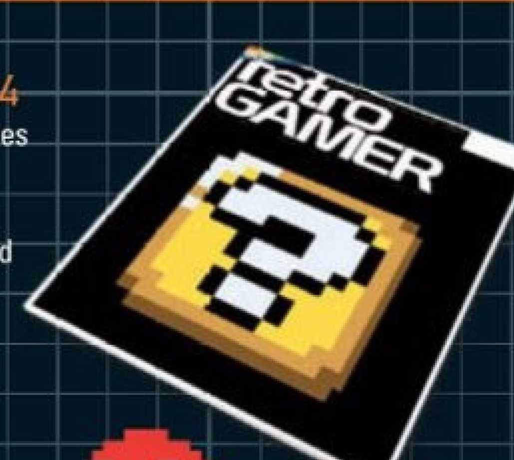
3 October 1974
■ Games developer Jaleco, shortened down from Japan Leisure Corporation, is founded.



7 October 2010
■ *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow* is released by Konami on Xbox 360 and PS3 in Europe.



8 October 1984
■ Automata releases *Deus Ex Machina* on the Spectrum, with a synchronised soundtrack in a journey from birth to death.



11 October 2012
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.



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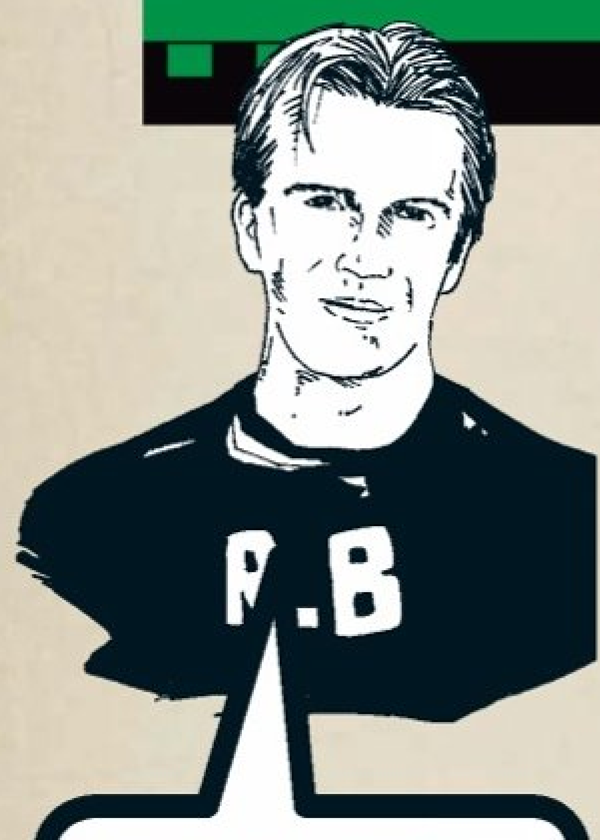
BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



» [Atari 2600] *Pac-Man*: infamous for being made in huge quantities and being buried in a big hole.

» [Arcade] *Robotron: 2084* was, and still is, simply one of the best coin-op games ever.





MARCH 1982 Pacmania hits Atari 2600, Atari devours Munchkin, Robotron: 2084 hits the arcades, Coleco goes tabletop gaming, Imagic unveils its first wave of games and Clive Sinclair gets ready for a rubbery future. Richard Burton prepares for chuntey

THE LATEST NEWS FROM MARCH 1982

Atari released the highly anticipated 2600 conversion of that *Pac-Man* game that was still packing out arcades across the world. Their Atari 2600 cartridge hit the video game stores of America priced $37.95 and sold unbelievably well, to begin with…

Pac-Man on 2600 gave game reviewers a field day. They dissected the game and micro-analysed every single aspect, such was the weight of expectation. And their initial reaction was not good. With flickering sprites, dull unimaginative mazes, sounds and colours bearing little resemblance to the original arcade game, no bonus fruit, an escape tunnel positioned so poorly it was completely devoid of usefulness, and Pac-Man himself not even facing the correct way when moving up and down a maze, there was plenty for them to be disgruntled about.

It wasn't the worst videogame ever made, but it was a hugely disappointing arcade conversion. It bore all the hallmarks of something that had been hurriedly cobbled together for a rushed release to satisfy the urges of oodles of *Pac-Man* fans. Still, Atari felt it was going to be a massive seller and produced the cartridge in colossal quantities. They thought literally every Atari 2600 owner, around 10 million at that time, would want a copy and estimated another two million would buy a console just to play *Pac-Man*.

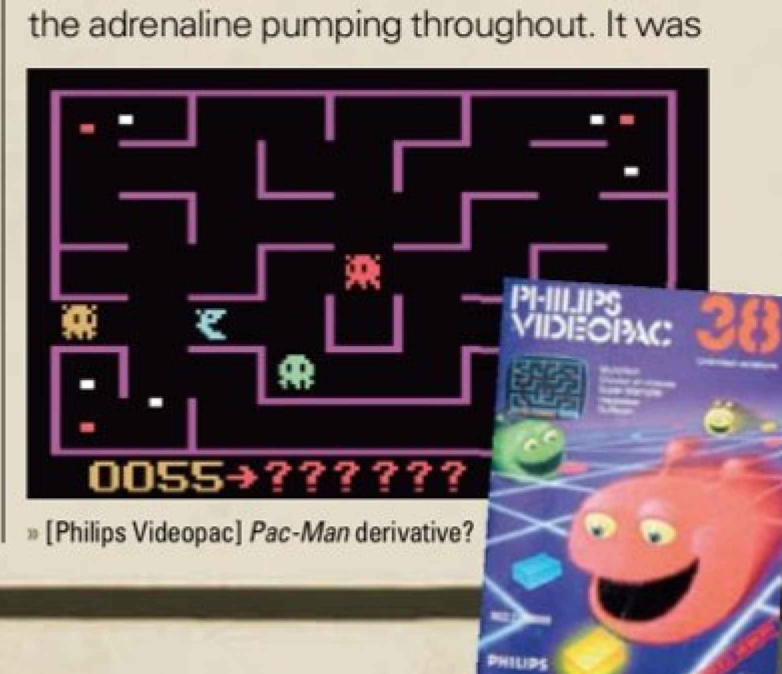
With extreme optimism and a complete disregard for economics, Atari produced 12 million cartridges and waited for a tidal wave of money to hit them squarely in the bank balance. To be fair to Atari, *Pac-Man* did eventually go on to become the biggest selling Atari 2600 game ever with seven million unit sales, but that still left a mammoth amount of plastic going unplayed and unloved. The surplus cartridges became the stuff of legend when they were eventually dumped, along with several million copies of Atari's other infamous games release, *E.T. – The Extra-Terrestrial*, in a big hole topped off with an extra thick layer of cement somewhere in New Mexico.

With *Pac-Man* hitting stores and the wallets of parents with equal ferocity, it was the turn of Philips and Magnavox to invite the wrath of Atari's legal department into their lives. Having been licensed to create the first home versions of Namco's *Pac-Man*, Atari was once again miffed. The Magnavox 2/Philips Videopac game *Munchkin* had been released and sold relatively well for several months.

The game was *Pac-Man* in style but with subtle differences which actually made the game a lot more playable than the belated Atari version. With Pacmania spreading, *Munchkin* was given an advertising push in the press and Atari took notice. Atari had already, unsuccessfully, tried to halt the sale of *Munchkin* by citing copyright infringement but persisted and on appeal they won. *Munchkin* was withdrawn from sale.

While arcade coin-op conversion releases were less than fantastic this month, one new game released into murky arcades across the country would soon become an all-time fan favourite. Vid Kidz, a games development company formed by Eugene Jarvis and Larry DeMar, who had left Williams Electronics just over a year ago, had created a new coin-op, *Robotron: 2084*, for their former employer.

The basic premise of the game was that you live in a time when robots have taken over and turned against their creators. Your task is to destroy all the robots and save as many surviving humans as possible while racking up as many points as you can. The 2D single-screen shooter didn't sound that awe-inspiring and the graphics looked simplistic even for 1982. However, the gameplay was amazing. With an intensity that few other arcade games had, the constant waves of robots kept the adrenaline pumping throughout. It was



» [Philips Videopac] *Pac-Man* derivative?

MARCH 1982 NEWS

19 March saw around 50 Argentines land at Leith Harbour in South Georgia, part of the British colony of the Falkland Islands, and plant the Argentine flag. The group allegedly had a commercial contract to collect scrap metal although this was disputed as they had arrived on a ship chartered by the Argentine government. The event was seen as an act of provocation with talks having broken down between British and Argentine governments regarding the sovereignty of the Falklands. Talks had been held in February between the two governments but they collapsed after Argentina declared it would seek other means of solving the dispute more quickly.

5 March saw the death of American actor and comedian John Belushi. He found fame as one of the original members of the TV show *Saturday Night Live* which he later left to pursue a career in film. He starred in *1941*



» *The Blues Brothers* was accompanied by a rather funky soundtrack, which included plenty of famous musicians.

and *Animal House*, but would be best remembered for playing Joliet Jake Blues, one half of the Blues Brothers.

Notable movie premieres this month included the comedy *Porky's* (19 March) and Arnold Schwarzenegger's *Conan The Barbarian* (15 March) while on US television, the comedy series *Police Squad!* starring Leslie Nielsen as Sergeant Frank Drebin, aired for the first time. It ran for just six episodes before being cancelled, despite being well received. Thankfully Frank Drebin returned once more as the hapless sergeant six years later in the first of three *The Naked Gun* movies.

» Coleco released official tabletop versions of classic coin-ops. No 10p pieces needed, just vast amounts of batteries.



difficult at times but the learning curve wasn't harsh enough to turn you off the game. Also, the ingenious control system was as intriguing as it was precise, with Jarvis opting for a dual joystick control; one for direction and one for shooting.

Robotron: 2084 proved to be a huge arcade smash, and rightly so, and it still remains one of the most enjoyable arcade games ever produced. However, it did attract a spot of legal wrangling when the mighty Walt Disney attempted to sue Williams for their use of 'tron' in the game title as it, apparently, infringed on the copyright of their new movie *Tron*. Thankfully, common sense prevailed and Williams won.

Arcade games were set to shrink, thanks to Coleco and a licensing agreement with arcade game manufacturers. Some of the biggest coin-op names in the arcades were set to be converted into electronic tabletop versions complete with super bright fluorescent displays and a penchant for guzzling batteries. Among the first wave of releases were official versions of *Pac-Man*, *Frogger*, *Donkey Kong* and *Berzerk*.

Formed late in 1981 and just beginning to release software was Imagic. Primarily focusing on the console gaming market, it specialised in producing Atari 2600, Mattel Intellivision and ColecoVision games. It was only the second third-party games developer to be producing games for the 2600 (the first being Activision) and, like Activision, several of Imagic's key figures were former Atari and Mattel employees. Impending releases by Imagic for the 2600 included *Atlantis* and the *Phoenix* clone *Demon Attack*, with the Intellivision getting the uniquely playable *Micro Surgeon*.

Excitement was building as titbits of information regarding Clive Sinclair's new computer began to sneak into the computing press. Apparently his new colour computer would have a rubber keyboard, a choice of 16K or 48K models and unlike the ZX81, it would have colour and sound. The new machine would be out next month but what would it be called? The ZX81 Colour or ZX82? Neither, it was the ZX Spectrum that was about to change home computing and gaming in the UK forever.



» Sinclair's ZX Spectrum is due for release in April. Home computing and gaming will never be the same again…

THIS MONTH IN...



YOUR COMPUTER

YC interviewed the producer of the BBC TV show, *The Computer Programme*, the pre-cursor to *Micro Live*. Paul Kriwaczek told of problems finding a main presenter until David Bellamy, the bearded botanist, who had worked with Kriwaczek before, mentioned the name of Ian McNaught-Davis.





COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES

C&VG and Taito organised the Best Arcade Player tournament in London. Nine finalists competed on various machines with new coin-op, *Qix*, being the deciding game with Peter Whitton emerging triumphant. Embarrassingly, Steve Davis, snooker star and tournament presenter, challenged Peter to a game of *Qix* and beat him.





ELECTRONIC GAMES

The American magazine looked at the Atari 400 computer. It had a distinctive monoplaner (touch-activated flat switch) keyboard. "It is an excellent foundation for a home gaming system" and "judging by its rapid acceptance by consumers, gamers evidently share this opinion," *EG* felt.



CHARTS

MARCH 1982

ACORN ATOM



1 Atom Chess (Bug-Byte)
2 3D Asteroids (Program Power)
3 747 Flight Simulation (Bug-Byte)
4 Space Invaders (Bug-Byte)
5 Minefield (A&F Software)

ZX81



1 Football Manager (Addictive Games)
2 Chess (Micro Gen)
3 QS Asteroids (Quicksilva)
4 Dictator (Bug-Byte)
5 Centipede (DK 'Tronics)

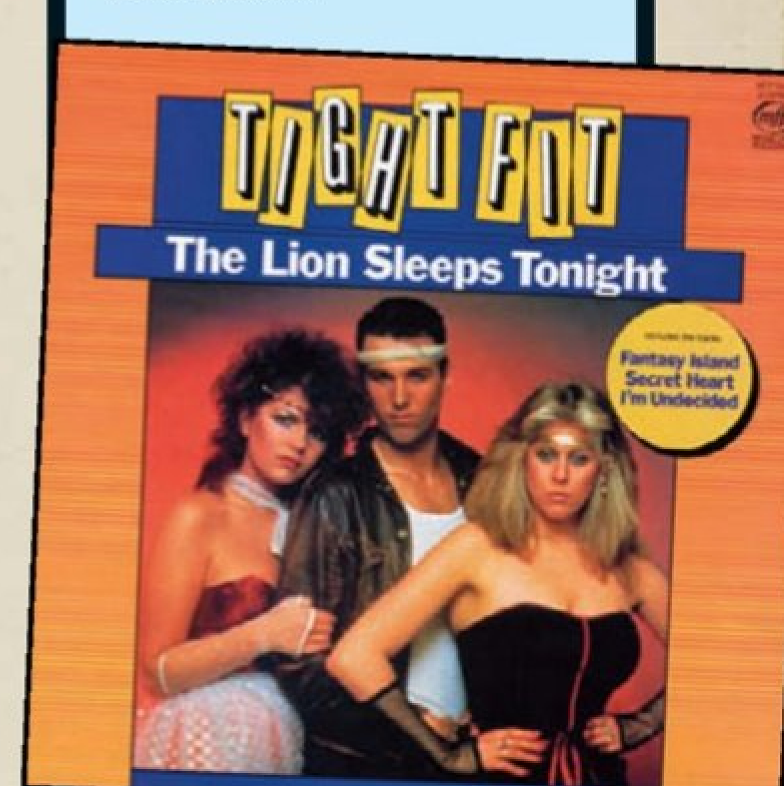
APPLE II



1 Castle Wolfenstein (Muse)
2 Space Eggs (Sirius Software)
3 Alien Typhoon (Star Craft)
4 Gorgon (Sirius)
5 Raster Blaster (BudgeCo Inc.)

MUSIC

1 The Lion Sleeps Tonight (Tight Fit)
2 Seven Tears (The Goombay Dance Band)
3 Mickey (Toni Basil)
4 Just an Illusion (Imagination)
5 Quiereme Mucho (Yours) (Julio Iglesias)

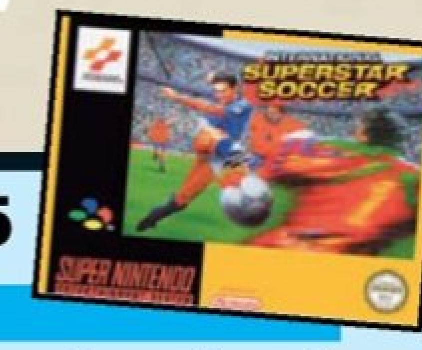


BACK TO THE NINETIES



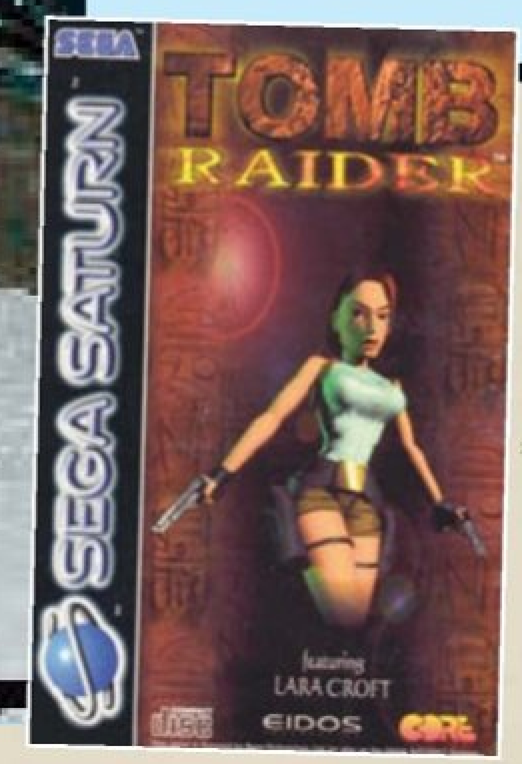
CHARTS

JUNE 1995

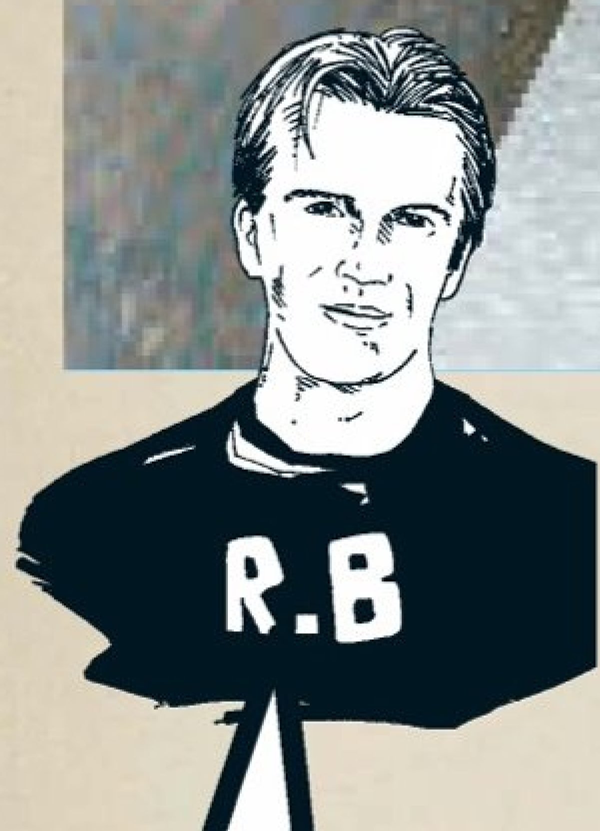


SNES

1. International Superstar Soccer (Konami)
2. Super Punch Out (Nintendo)
3. Star Trek: Future's Past (MicroProse)
4. Cannon Fodder (Virgin Games)
5. NBA Jam Tournament Edition (Acclaim)



» [Sega Saturn] Lara Croft made her debut appearance, and quickly became a gaming icon.



THE LATEST NEWS FROM JUNE 1995

JUNE 1995 Rumours about PlayStation, Commodores to buy, it's just not cricket on the SNES, the dreadful Dredd arrives, Theme Hospital cures the Squits while Core Design helps to develop the lovely Ms Croft

Sony's PlayStation console was just over six months old but already the rumourmongers were analysing quotes from Sony, believing that they were already preparing the groundwork for a PlayStation 2 and possibly a PlayStation 3. Considering that the original PlayStation was still three months away from its official UK release, news of new consoles seemed to be more wishful thinking and conjecture than insider information. The proposed timeline of release for the PS2 was 1998 and the PS3 2003. This proved not to be too far out with actual release dates of 2000 and 2006.

The sad and lingering demise of Commodore International over the last year hadn't made for great viewing but, after several months of bids from various parties, a successful bidder was announced. Sadly, it wasn't Commodore UK, the party everyone was hoping for. Despite its parent company going into liquidation, Commodore UK was the only surviving subsidiary of Commodore International's bankruptcy. It did place a bid to take over the operation, and was considered the favourite for many months but was ultimately beaten by German PC manufacturer, Escom. The price was a mere $14 million.

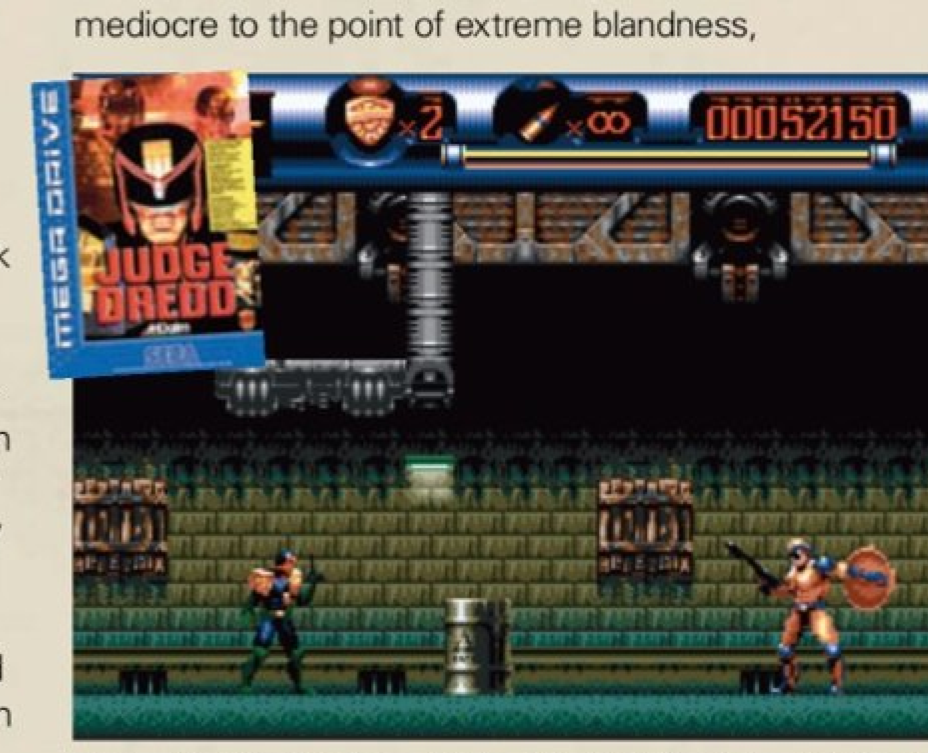
What could be more English than playing cricket in the summer? Playing cricket on a SNES while the "summer" floods your back garden, that's what. The first and only cricket game to appear on the SNES was *Super International Cricket* published by Nintendo and developed by Beam Software, former developer for the much-loved Eighties software house Melbourne House.

It was a follow-up to *International Cricket* on the NES but, without better graphics, the same old bugbears arose. It was unofficial, so there was no licensing in place for the use of real names, there was just one pitch to play on and there was also just the one monotonously painful tune to beat you into submission.

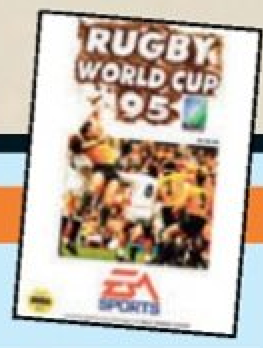
Sega and Codemasters thought they could avoid the follow-on and released *Brian Lara's Cricket*, hoping for a more thoughtful attempt at recreating the thwack of leather against willow. To their credit, they did. With up to four players and that all-important (ish) licence to use real player names/team names, it gave their recreation a hint of realism. The game was a hit (over silly midpoint for a four) and sold extremely well on Mega Drive.

Although Codemasters published the game, it was developed by Audiogenic and inspired by their previous cricketing creation *Graham Gooch Cricket* for the Amiga and Atari ST, which in turn was a follow-up to the 1986 game, *Graham Gooch's Test Cricket*, which was on the ZX Spectrum, C64 and Amstrad.

Hot on the trail of the new *Judge Dredd* movie was Acclaim's game of the film. Released on the SNES, Mega Drive, Game Boy and Game Gear, *Judge Dredd* was a run-and-gun affair featuring familiar backdrops for levels such as Mega-City 1, the Cursed Earth and Aspen Penal Colony. The decent graphics in *Dredd* were tempered by a mindnumbing lack of originality. The levels were overly long, samey and excessively unforgiving. It was mediocre to the point of extreme blandness,



» [Mega Drive] Dredd is the law. Stallone is Dredd. Stallone is dreadful. End of.







MEGA DRIVE	AMIGA	MUSIC
1 Rugby World Cup (Electronic Arts)	**1** Super Skidmarks (Acid Software)	**1** Unchained Melody/White Cliffs Of Dover (Robson & Jerome)
2 FIFA Soccer '95 (Electronic Arts)	**2** Sensible World Of Soccer (Renegade)	**2** Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me, Kill Me (U2)
3 Road Rash 3: Tour De Force (Electronic Arts)	**3** Pinball Illusions (21st Century)	**3** Common People (Pulp)
4 Mortal Kombat 2 (Acclaim)	**4** Roadkill (Acid Software)	**4** I Need Your Loving (Baby D)
5 Story Of Thor (Sega)	**5** Theme Park (Electronic Arts)	**5** Scream (Michael Jackson & Janet Jackson)

but the pixels were still better at portraying Dredd than Stallone was.

Not content with producing one comic-based game this month, Acclaim also released *Justice League Task Force*, essentially a 2D fighting gaming in a similar style to *Street Fighter. Justice League* pitted DC super heroes against each other including Wonder Woman, Superman, Batman, Aquaman and the Flash. With such good source material, surely a splendid battle of hero against hero would ensue? No, it was a very run-of-the-mill fighting game which only really warranted a look due to the novelty factor of pitching Batman against Superman. SNES and Mega Drive owners were left sorely disappointed.

With Bullfrog's *Theme Park* doing well in the software charts, it came as no surprise to find they were working on another theme game, *Theme Hospital*. This simulation of micromanagement saw you design and maintain a hospital. You got to hire staff from handymen to doctors, buy facilities for your hospital and stick to financial constraints, and all the while attending to a sickly bunch of patients with a wide ranging and bizarre set of ailments including Bloaty Head, the Uncommon Cold, Heaped Piles and the downright awful Squits. Now wash your hands.



» [Mega Drive] Where else could you see Wonder Woman fighting Green Arrow except in *Justice League Task Force*?





» [PC] If you've got the Squits or a dose of Heaped Piles, get yourself to *Theme Hospital* for some medicated fun.

Development for *Theme Hospital* was at a very early stage, so much so that it would take almost two years to arrive on PC and a further year for the PlayStation release. However, it was worth the wait.

Bullfrog also gave hints that their RPG game project *Dungeon Keeper* was progressing swimmingly and should be available in stores in time for Christmas. It actually arrived the summer of 1997.

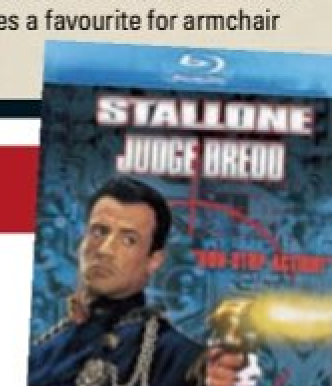
The real-time strategy blended with the role-playing element made *Dungeon Keeper* a superbly atmospheric and absorbing game. The artificial intelligence worked really well and the multiplayer option gave the game longevity. *Dungeon Keeper* was slightly different from the norm as you got to control the dungeon and all the monsters that lived inside it, with the aim of repelling the hero characters looking for treasure. It was a magnificent final Bullfrog title for Peter Molyneux, who left the company shortly after its release.

Sega Saturn gamers had great news on a new game being developed by Core Design. The third-person perspective action adventure starred a female archaeologist called Lara Croft who travels the globe trying to find artefacts and solve puzzles. With a new take on the genre, *Tomb Raider* immediately grasped the gaming community's interest with its stylish *Indiana Jones*-style romp, and particularly pouty kickass protagonist.



» [SNES] *International Superstar Soccer* is released on the SNES by Konami and becomes a favourite for armchair football fans.

JUNE 1995 NEWS



» *Judge Dredd* hits the cinemas for the first time and instantly thousands of *2000AD* fans are gutted…

It was movie overload this month with several premieres. Some were awesome, some were awful. Speaking of the latter, 9 June saw the world premiere of *Batman Forever*. This tragic addition saw Val Kilmer don the Batman cowl, backed up by the introduction of Robin, played by Chris O'Donnell. The villains of choice were Two Face (Tommy Lee Jones) and the annoyingly annoying Riddler (Jim Carrey). Holy steaming pile of bum conkers, Batman!

16 June saw the entertaining *Bad Boys* arrive in UK cinemas. Will Smith and Martin Lawrence play two cops trying to find a stolen stash of drugs while trying to protect a murder witness.

On 22 June, Houston had a problem. Ron Howard's superb movie of the infamous *Apollo 13* space mission retold the story of the damaged capsule running out of oxygen and the efforts of the men back on Earth attempting to save them.

30 June saw *Judge Dredd*'s world premiere, to the indignation of *2000AD* fans. The scenery may have been spot on but the portrayal of Dredd by Sylvester Stallone was poor. With catchphrases like "I knew you'd say that," the never-to-be-removed helmet removed early in the movie, and the most ridiculous sidekick in the world in Rob Schneider, it was not the *Dredd* fans wanted. 23 June saw a similar story with the movie adaption of the cult UK comic strip character *Tank Girl*. Lori Petty played the title role, fighting a water-hogging corporation. Great source material, disappointing movie.

THIS MONTH IN…

SUPERPLAY



It was off with the console and off to the cinema for *Superplay* as they reviewed the new *Street Fighter* movie, starring Jean Claude Van Damme. Obviously not caring for it too much, their verdict was pretty damning; "We can only guess at the expression on the faces of the Capcom big suits when they saw this celluloid disaster."



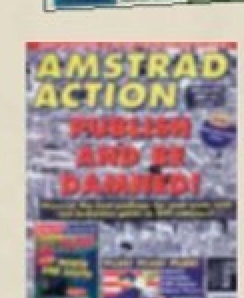
MEAN MACHINES SEGA



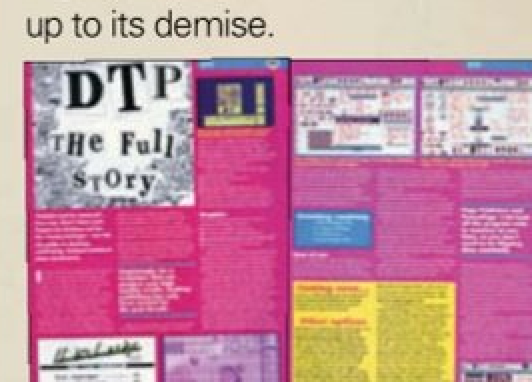
FIFA International Soccer was taking all the footballing plaudits but another fine football game with fast gameplay and an arcade feel was also released. *Fever Pitch* was often overlooked but shouldn't have been, with its unique features like unsporting behaviour such as diving and other cheating abilities on display. Take his standing leg out.



AMSTRAD ACTION



It was farewell to the much-loved magazine *Amstrad Action* with its final issue this month. The wafer thin 24-page issue 117 was to be the last despite the 118th issue of *Amstrad Action* being advertised and given a release date. **RG**'s own David Crookes was a regular contributor to *Amstrad Action* up to its demise.

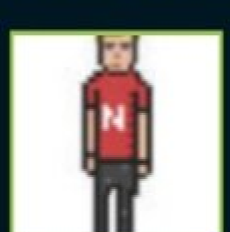


retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

3D Stock Car Championship

STOCKS AND SHARES

#54



» ZX SPECTRUM
» FIREBIRD SOFTWARE LTD
» 1988

Multiplayer gaming is part and parcel of most modern games, particularly with the online experience enabling you to hook up with an unending amount of people across the world. Back in the mid Eighties, however, it was a slightly more infrequent affair.

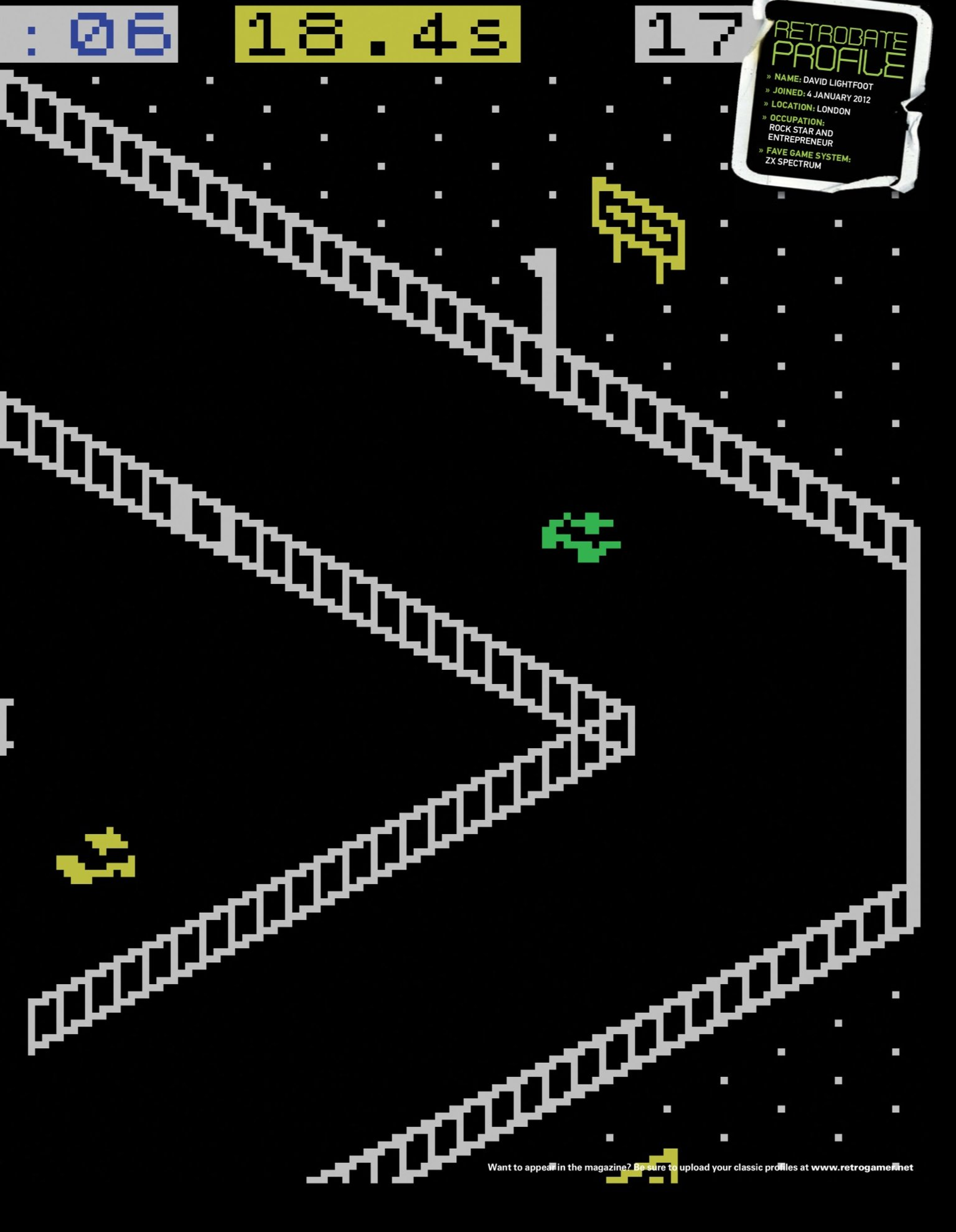
Plugging in a hefty peripheral would sometimes enable two people to play a game simultaneously, or squeezing around a keyboard using redefined keys, but usually gaming with friends would be a turn-based experience. If you had any siblings, then this often resulted in altercations on who was next.

3D Stock Car Championship from Firebird Software was able to solve this problem, although this time the fighting would inevitably be over who had won and how. I remember cramming around the small plastic keys of our Spectrum 48K+ with my brother and two friends to play this, at the time, particularly ground-breaking multiplayer game.

This was four-player simultaneous play and all from a £1.99 Silver Range cassette! I have many fond memories of this title, but I particularly remember the excellent game mechanics making the different-coloured cars skid with momentum across the line drawn isometric '3D' tracks. Crashing into each other and bumping around the course like real life stock car racing, which I'd recently seen for a friend's birthday party in Wimbledon.

The winner of the race is the player with the fastest lap time within the time limit, stirring you to try to build up your speed as much as possible with some nifty use of the accelerator. After the race you are awarded points, seven for the winner down to one for last place, all adding up to your position in the leaderboard. Also of note is the addition of a rather hilarious rendition of the Formula 1 theme at the beginning of each race.

Overall a very enjoyable multiplayer game that seems to be often overlooked. *3D Stock Car* is like a slightly simpler, less glamorous version of *Super Sprint*, much like real stock car racing is to Formula 1 and I love it.



RETROBATE PROFILE

» **NAME:** DAVID LIGHTFOOT

» **JOINED:** 4 JANUARY 2012

» **LOCATION:** LONDON

» **OCCUPATION:**
ROCK STAR AND ENTREPRENEUR

» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:**
ZX SPECTRUM

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30 YEARS OF ROBOTRON

"The human race is inefficient and therefore must be destroyed." Ten words that kicked off the cult of Robotron. Along with some of the new wave of game designers who helped revitalise the twin-stick shooter for the modern age, Mike Bevan explores the enduring appeal of Eugene Jarvis and Larry DeMar's arcade masterpiece



ROBO LOVE
JOHN ROMERO (DOOM)

"At the start of the Eighties, back when arcades ruled supreme, games were *fast*. Quarters went into these games *fast*. It was a real challenge to be able to play an arcade game past five minutes on one quarter. And the games were made for quick reflexes and fast thinking. Of all the games that ruled the arcades, *Robotron* was the most manic, complex and pulse-pounding experience that anyone had encountered. Two joysticks, moving and firing in any of eight directions independently, assumed that anyone good at the game was a real master. Eugene Jarvis had created the ultimate arcade game."



R*obotron*. Its very name can send even the most battle-hardened arcade fan into a volley of nervous spasms and involuntary muscle twitches. An unrelenting barrage of digital cybernetic hostility in a single black screen, this savage blaster chewed up players and their coinage as if there was no tomorrow, which was rather apt considering the game's apocalyptic storyline. Yet despite its unyielding nature, *Robotron* remains highly regarded among retro gamers and developers alike, something that's evident from **RG**'s Desert Island Disks feature over the years – it's still the foremost requested game among our castaway list of veteran designers.

Created by Eugene Jarvis and Larry DeMar, *Robotron* was the third videogame the pair designed for Williams Electronics, following the equally well-received pairing of *Defender* and *Stargate*. It's a nightmarishly dystopian vision, as the encircling robotic horde hunts the last surviving human family, seeking the rapid demise of our goggle-eyed hero. "The game was inspired by a number of influences," recalls Eugene. "First off, I loved Al McNeil's robot killer game *Berzerk*. The great sounds and primal kill-or-be-killed action were a huge rush. But I became frustrated by the single-joystick control. I wanted to make a game with significantly more firepower. I was also inspired by the early Commodore PET game *Chase*, which used 24x80 line text-based graphics, where the player tried to run away from enemies while luring them into a minefield to their death. Throw in elements from *Defender* and *Pac-Man* and you've got a lot of the gameplay.

"We started with the game engine from *Defender*/*Stargate*. I concentrated on the character/projectile behaviour, level design and game mechanic, while Larry basically did everything else, including all the mind-blowing special effects. To move the pixels, Larry and I specced out what we called the *Robotron* graphics DMA chip, which may have been the first graphics co-processor for a colour bitmapped system capable of rendering arbitrary-sized programmable 2D images. The DMA chip made possible all the amazing explosion and particle effects in the game, as well as powering the gluttonous pixel rate."

Notwithstanding the game's splendid presentation and masterful use of colour and sound, it's the now-familiar twin-joystick control system that's *Robotron*'s crowning glory. With the first stick to move the player character and a second to guide an unending stream of bullets, it's far easier to get to grips with than *Defender*'s complex controls. *Robotron* wasn't the first videogame to use it, but it was arguably the first shooter that needed dual-stick controls as a conscious design choice. So was there a 'eureka!' moment when Eugene wired up that second stick for the first time?

"Totally," Eugene grins. "I started with one-joystick control, where you would just try to lure the robots into electrodes like the *Chase* game. And it was fun – for about five seconds. Then I realised you have to kill shit. Once I wired up the second 2600 stick for firing and screwed it to the control panel, I knew I was on the right track." Eugene's experience as a sound engineer on Williams' pinball games came in handy at this point. "I used the old ball-lock sound with echo decay from *Firepower* for firing, and I threw in a *Defender* explosion for a robot hit, and I started feeling the tension and release. Then when I dialled up the robot count to 128, the adrenal cortex overload was complete. Within moments, I was a sweating, gasping mass of smoking neurons…"

The fact that *Robotron*'s action takes place in a claustrophobic single-screen arena sets it apart from the pair's previous games, and helps ramp up the tension to coronary-inducing levels. "Where the cool thing about *Defender* was the freedom to fly beyond the single-screen space into an entire planetary world, *Robotron* was all about the tension of confinement," Eugene muses. "There was no escape from the confrontation, no fight or flight, only fight or fight."

One small ray of hope among the overall nihilism of the game is the ability to save members of the last human family: Mommy, Daddy and little Mikey. Quick reflexes can save them from electrification by Hulks or reprogramming by roaming Progs into cybernetic zombies. "This 'family' has direct parallels with the *Defender* astronauts," says Eugene. "I felt strongly that a game has to be about more than just killing – first from a play mechanic perspective. If everything is just a shoot-kill then the game gets old and stale quick. Spicing it up with a rescue dynamic enriched the game and added a lot of variety to play."

As for the game's renowned difficulty, Eugene is unrepentant, revealing that it could have been even more evil. "In the Eighties, the arcade scene was dominated by hardcore

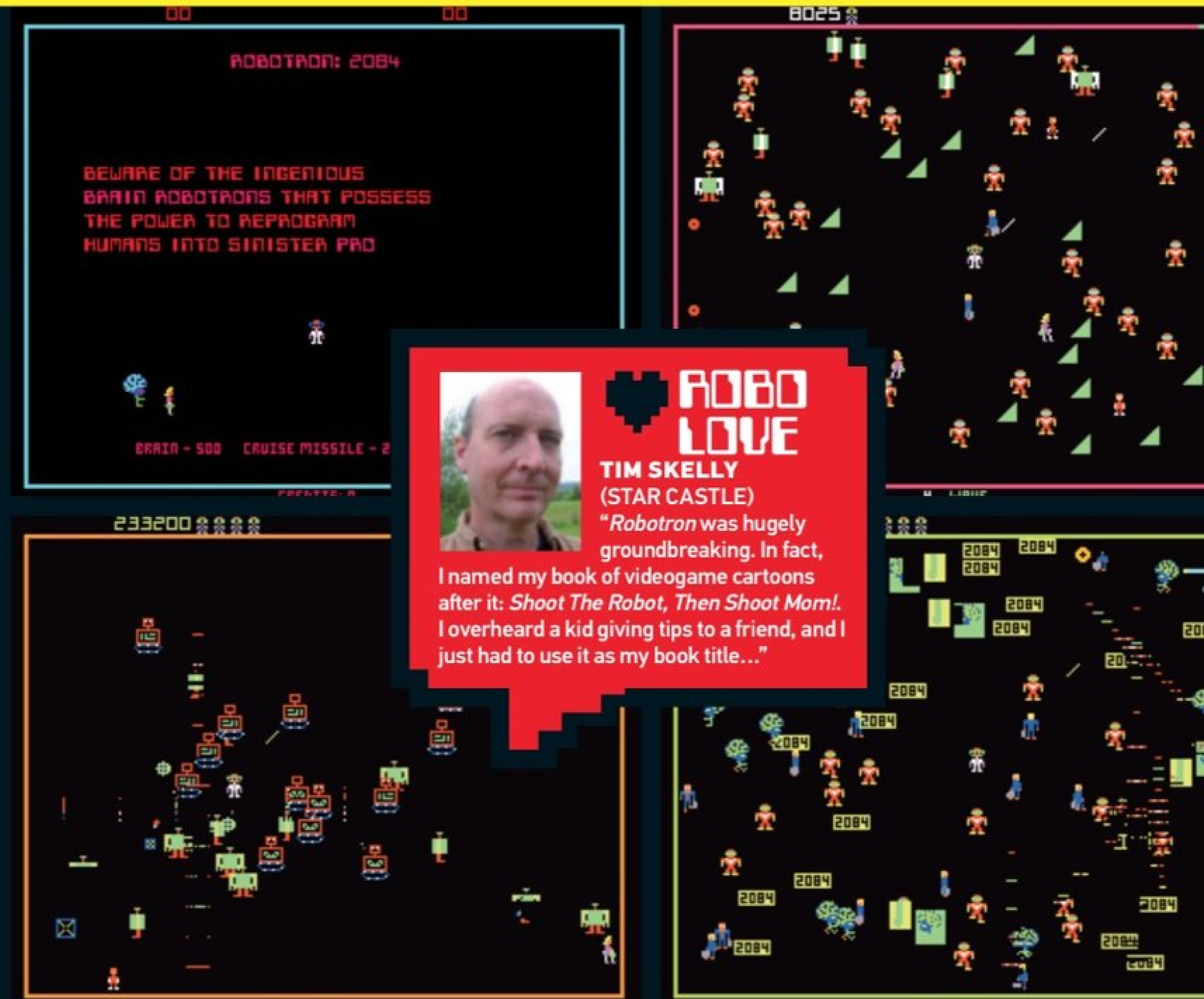


ROBO LOVE
MARK TURMELL (SMASH TV)

"*Robotron* is the greatest game of all time. It's why I joined Williams/Bally/Midway and created *Smash TV*. I went there to revive the dual-joystick mechanic. Eugene is still a good friend of mine, and I learned many lessons from him that I use to this day."

players, the type that would be playing *Call Of Duty* and other FPS games today," he reflects. "*Robotron* actually went out even harder at first, but it was just too brutal. The controls required independent motion of both hands, which was very new, and even today many players can't walk and chew gum at the same time. We had to lighten up the game."

We can only imagine what sort of state our wrists and synapses would have been in if he hadn't. Interestingly, it seems that if you were left-handed, you might have had a small advantage. "Observing cigarette burns on control panels, I could tell that *Robotron* had about a 50/50 mix of right- and left-handed players, which is very unusual since lefties make up only 10-15 per cent of the population," he remarks. "Because lefties have to adapt to a right-handed world, they are more ambidextrous than righties. Hence they make better *Robotron* players!"



ROBO LOVE

TIM SKELLY
(STAR CASTLE)

"*Robotron* was hugely groundbreaking. In fact, I named my book of videogame cartoons after it: *Shoot The Robot, Then Shoot Mom!*. I overheard a kid giving tips to a friend, and I just had to use it as my book title…"

Welcome to the Pleasure Dome

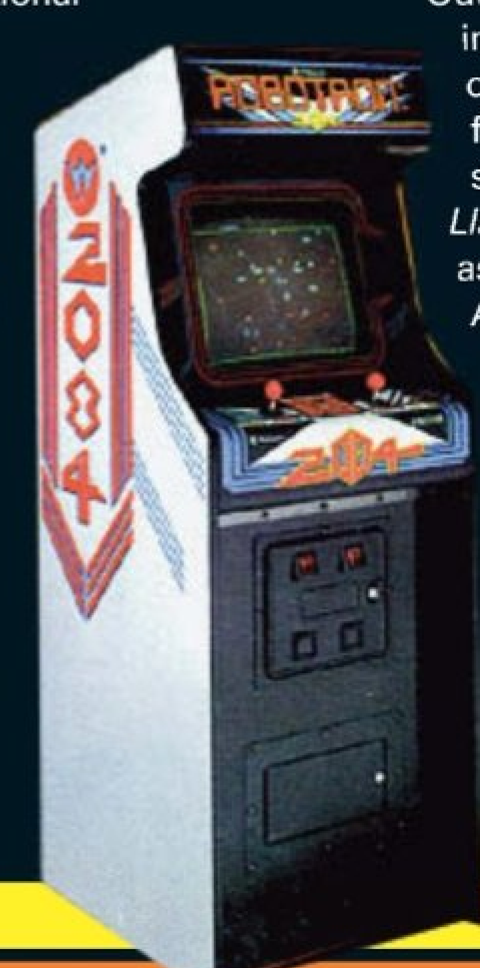
"When *Robotron* came out, I felt that the twin-stick control would rapidly dominate the industry," Eugene reveals. "But surprisingly few titles came out – probably due to the hardcore nature of the interface and the rising dominance of casual players. A big problem was the standard single joystick or joypad in consoles such as NES and Atari 2600. The ubiquitous single-stick paradigm effectively locked the twin-stick genre out of the consumer space. Most of the ports suffered from lack of dual joysticks, hardware performance, or if there were two joysticks, how do you nail them down to the coffee table?"

The hardware issue plagued many of the official home ports of *Robotron*, although some third-party efforts, such as Paul Holmes' Spectrum homage *Wild West Hero*, went some way to capturing the spirit of the arcade original. Even Eugene and Larry's sequel to the game, *Blaster*, abandoned the twin-stick model, and, despite flourishes of brilliance, was something of a flop. "*Blaster* is fun, but it failed to resonate with players for a few reasons, including the videogame crash and a tiring of space themes," Eugene admits. "We faced the problem all 3D flight games have suffered for many years. The action is very compelling and exciting on a primitive visual level, but it is hard to get meaningful gameplay and interaction as you blow through the universe at the speed of light. Repeat play becomes a huge issue."

One arcade game directly influenced by *Robotron* was Atari's excellent vector shoot-'em-up, *Black Widow*, as its creator, Bruce Merritt, explains: "We had a *Robotron* game in Atari engineering's common area and many of us had calluses from wrenching the joysticks, shooting brains and protecting our nuclear family. It was definitely inspirational in the use of controls in *Black Widow* – it was hard to argue how effective two sticks were in escaping in one direction while firing in another."

By 1990, arcade videogame hardware had evolved enough to tempt Eugene to return to the twin-stick shooter genre, with Mark Turmell and artist John Tobias. "The original concept for *Robotron* was really more in line with a huge multi-chamber world like *Smash TV*," he says, referring to his famously violent gameshow-themed shooter. "In arcade [design], the rule was ship the game when it becomes fun, and with *Robotron* a simple random-number-driven world generator did the trick, obviating the need for a hugely detailed world. So Mark, John and I wanted to go back and do this huge world culminating in the fabled 'Pleasure Domes'. Also, we were really jazzed to develop a new storyline based on *Running Man* and *RoboCop* memes."

The final instalment in Eugene's unofficial *Robotron* trilogy, 1993's *Total Carnage*, featured a distinctly Gulf War-inspired atmosphere, and ditched most of the static arena 'lock-ins' of *Smash TV*, something that Eugene admits may have been a mistake in terms of player excitement levels. "For *Total Carnage*, we tried a scrolling mechanic, and the game really lost something," he admits. "It became just a fire-hose kind of shooter without the tension."



Outside of Eugene's own inventions, there were a few other interesting takes on the format, including Jeff Minter's surreal but brilliant homage, *Llamatron*, which was released as a shareware title for the Atari ST and Amiga. Midway's *Robotron X*, released in 1996 on the PlayStation and PC, and later ported to the N64, brought the original game up to date in 3D, with varying success depending on how well players were able to utilise the 3D camera.

» [XBLA] The utterly beautiful *Geometry Wars* franchise is arguably the most popular *Robotron* clone of recent times.



EUGENIUS!

The ten best games of Eugene Jarvis… aside from Robotron



01 DEFENDER

Defender's stark beauty, multi-dimensional gameplay and stunning pyrotechnics were a revelation back in 1980, more surprisingly given that it was Eugene's videogame debut. It revitalised the fortunes of manufacturer Williams to such an extent that Stan Jarocki, marketing head at arch-rival Midway, was heard to comment: "For a first effort, *Defender* is amazing."





08 CRUIS'N USA

The first in Eugene's much-admired driving series, *Cruis'n USA* was a lighthearted take on the arcade racer, with a physics engine that favoured spectacular spins, crashes and airborne vehicles over realism. The game's visuals, which were painstakingly digitised from real-life locations, are a real asset in bringing the various courses from around the US to life.



02 FIREPOWER

This highly regarded pinball table from legendary designer Steve Ritchie was the first electronic pinball machine to feature now-standard elements like 'lane change' and multi-ball. Eugene was responsible for the game's software and memorable sound effects, while the table's classic layout went on to inspire the hit video pinball simulation, *David's Midnight Magic*.



04 BLASTER

Vid Kidz' last videogame, this unofficial *Robotron* follow-up is a fast-paced 3D space shooter. Despite negative comparisons to *Robotron*, *Blaster* is a great bit of programming; its psychedelic Lego-brick visuals convey a real sense of speed. The game's rarity and heritage has made it popular with collectors, with the attractive Duramold cabinet being particularly sought after.



06 SMASH TV

Eugene's triumphant return to the twin-stick shooter, *Smash TV* is an ultra-violent gameshow-themed blaster where big guns, rather than points, mean prizes. Building on *Robotron*, it adds an exploration element, a variety of funky weapons, and some particularly gnarly bosses, including the infamous Mutoid Man. Winning a brand new VCR was never so much fun.



09 CRUIS'N WORLD

Racing games were big business in the Nineties, so it was inevitable that Eugene would be asked to produce another. This time there's a globe-trotting theme and a new stunt system. After one last sequel, 1999's *Cruis'n Exotica*, the series became the highest-grossing arcade racing franchise of all time.



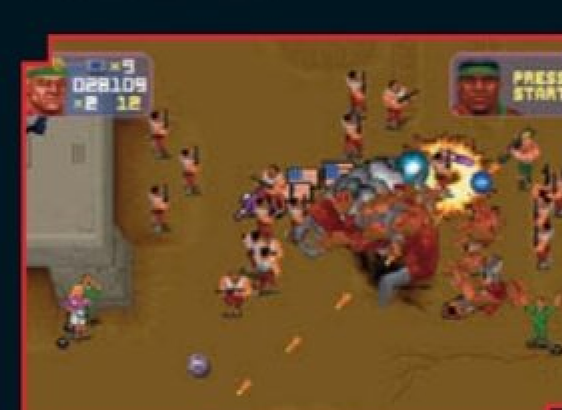
03 STARGATE

With *Defender*'s massive success under their belt, Eugene and Larry left Williams to form their own company, Vid Kidz. *Stargate*, the sequel to their debut hit, was the first project under this new moniker. It features similarly blistering gameplay, adding new enemies and features, like the Stargate itself, which served as a portal to nearby humanoids in distress.



05 NARC

This controversial scrolling shooter was one of the first games to use the digitised graphics technique later made famous by *Mortal Kombat*. *Narc*'s body count would make Arnie blush – blowing the appendages off drug lords with Uzis and rocket launchers is entertainingly silly, although pacifists can go for the less lethal approach of arresting suspects for bonus points.



07 TOTAL CARNAGE

The final slice of twin-stick mayhem from Eugene and Mark Turmell, *Total Carnage* takes place in a fictional Middle Eastern state where a crazed dictator is in cahoots with evil space aliens. Despite some clever ideas, it doesn't scale the lofty heights of its predecessors, but is still an enjoyable romp.



10 THE FAST AND THE FURIOUS

Licensed from the popular 2001 street-racing flick, this arcade racer is very much the spiritual successor to the *Cruis'n* series. *The Fast And The Furious* lives up to the name of Eugene's production company, Raw Thrills, providing a high-octane rush through a variety of well-known US locales.

"*Llamatron* was a very cool and humorous take-off," says Eugene, praising Minter's take on his game. "But like almost all the classic arcade titles, the 3D thing just never worked out for *Robotron*. The 2D complete information God's-eye view is what makes the game happen. Getting whacked in the back or blindsided in a 3D world will never be fun. You really need the complete info of 2D to be able to handle the central nervous system overload *Robotron* is known for."

ROBO LOVE



JEFF MINTER (LLAMATRON)

"Eugene Jarvis was my absolute hero back then, and his designs had a major influence on my own style. My favourite was without doubt *Robotron*. This superlative game was presented in what was the signature style of Jarvis and Larry DeMar – fast action, large numbers of brightly coloured enemies, and wonderful explosions that shattered the enemies into tiny pieces all over the screen when shot. A twin-stick control system allowed you to move and fire with great precision and accuracy – an absolute necessity in a game that was brutally, beautifully, *sensually* difficult."

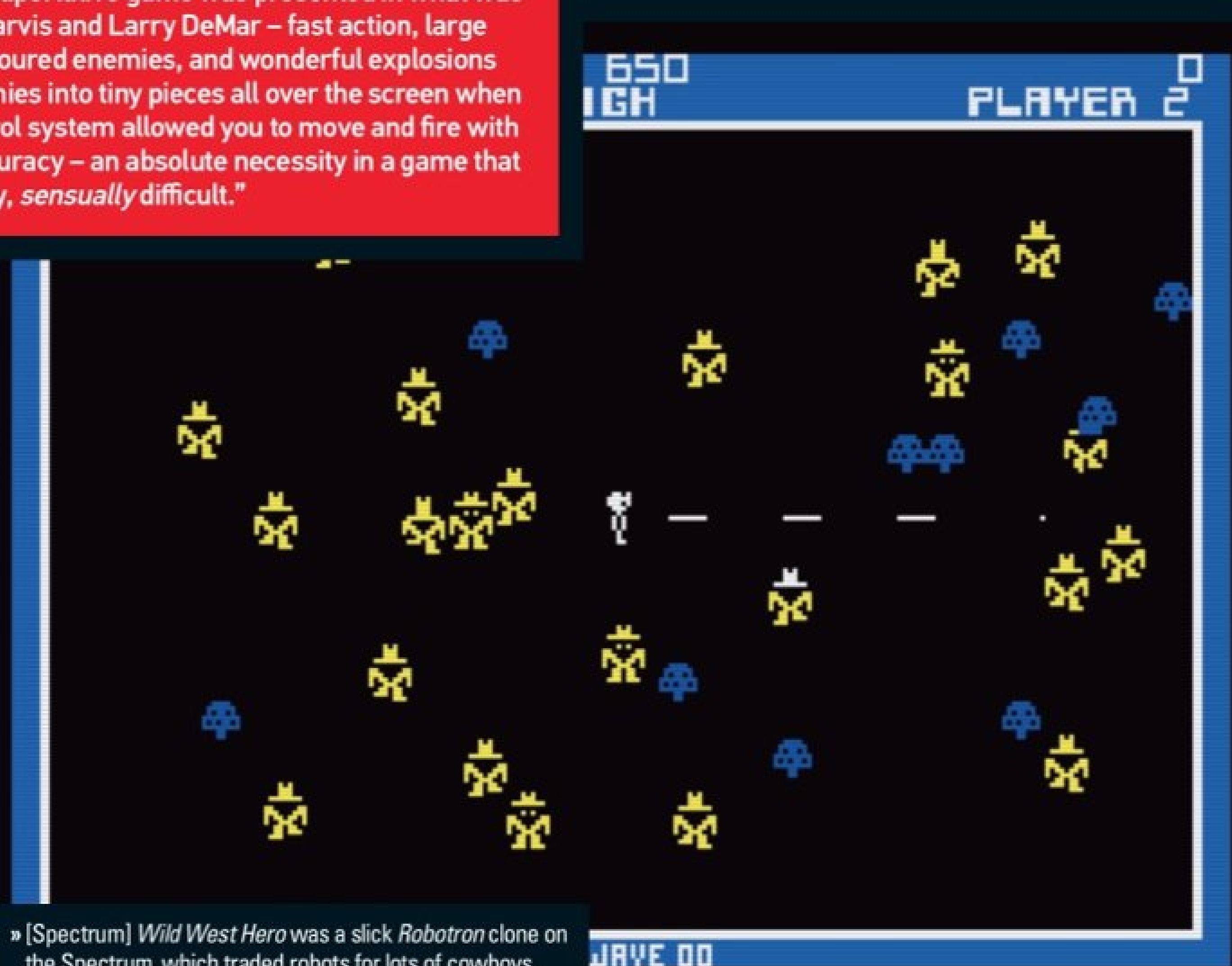
The twin-stick revival

Ironically, it was one of the banes of a retro gaming fan's life that turned out to be the saviour of twin-stick shooting games – the rise of the first-person shooter. "It wasn't until the dominance of FPS games drove dual-stick adoption in the Xbox and PlayStation DualShock controllers that the twin-stick approach became standard, almost 20 years after *Robotron*," says Eugene. "Next, the rise of retro players and the indie development community on Xbox Live Arcade created the current twin-stick game renaissance in its original 2D form."

One of the first, and arguably most influential, of the new wave of twin-stick shooters was Bizarre Creations' *Geometry Wars*, originally included as an Easter egg in *Project Gotham Racing 2*. "When I started at Bizarre, I ended up working on *PGR1*, being given most of the tasks the more senior coders couldn't be arsed to do," says designer Stephen Cakebread. "One task happened to be the code that interfaced with the Xbox joypad, so one evening while prototyping some code that dealt with the two analogue sticks I got a little bored, and because I was aware of the idea of the twin-stick shooting mechanic, and already had some code reading both sticks, it felt natural to experiment making a twin-stick shooter.

"One of the big differences in play that I noticed was the importance of position in *Robotron*, due to the eight-way shooting, whereas position in the first *Geometry Wars* is fairly unimportant – mostly you just circle forever. This added an extra layer to the gameplay in *Robotron*, so I wanted to replicate that feeling in the later *GW* games, but without limiting fire direction. So its influence on *Geometry Wars* is that it made me aware that you can make a fairly tactical game even when it's very chaotic, and prompted me to work on the gameplay to increase the number of decisions the player had to make. *Robotron*'s design is excellent, and anyone making a modern twin-stick shooter should definitely play it, as it has a lot to teach."

"My first experience of a game of that type would have been *Llamatron* on the Atari ST," says indie developer Charlie Knight. "I think I must have discovered *Robotron* after playing that. *Robotron*'s a really pure game, and I think that's a lot of the reason it's so well regarded. I'd say I got more from *Llamatron* on account of it being much less punishing, but it lacks *Robotron*'s punch and immediateness. I can't think of many other games that come close to it in this sense. In terms of



» [Spectrum] *Wild West Hero* was a slick *Robotron* clone on the Spectrum, which traded robots for lots of cowboys.

FANCY A CHALLENGE?

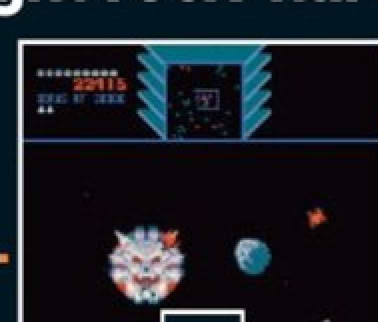
Eight rock-hard arcade games



01

DONKEY KONG

The King Of Kong goes to great lengths to convince us that *Donkey Kong* is the hardest arcade game. We haven't played everything to compare, but we'd guess it was pretty close, given the notorious Elevator stage, in which Donkey Kong bounces lethal springs across the screen at breakneck speed.



02

SINISTAR

Sinistar is notable for being modified to be far harder than originally intended, after dollar-hungry arcade operators complained that players were lasting longer than two minutes. It also features perhaps the most terrifying videogame boss of its era, the eponymous Sinistar. "Run, coward," indeed.



03

TEMPEST

Dave Theurer's abstract vector shooter brought a nightmare into the arcades, being inspired by a childhood dream of monsters pouring out of a hole in the ground. Like *Robotron*, *Tempest* is a wonderfully pure blaster, testing players' nerves before completely and utterly overwhelming.



04

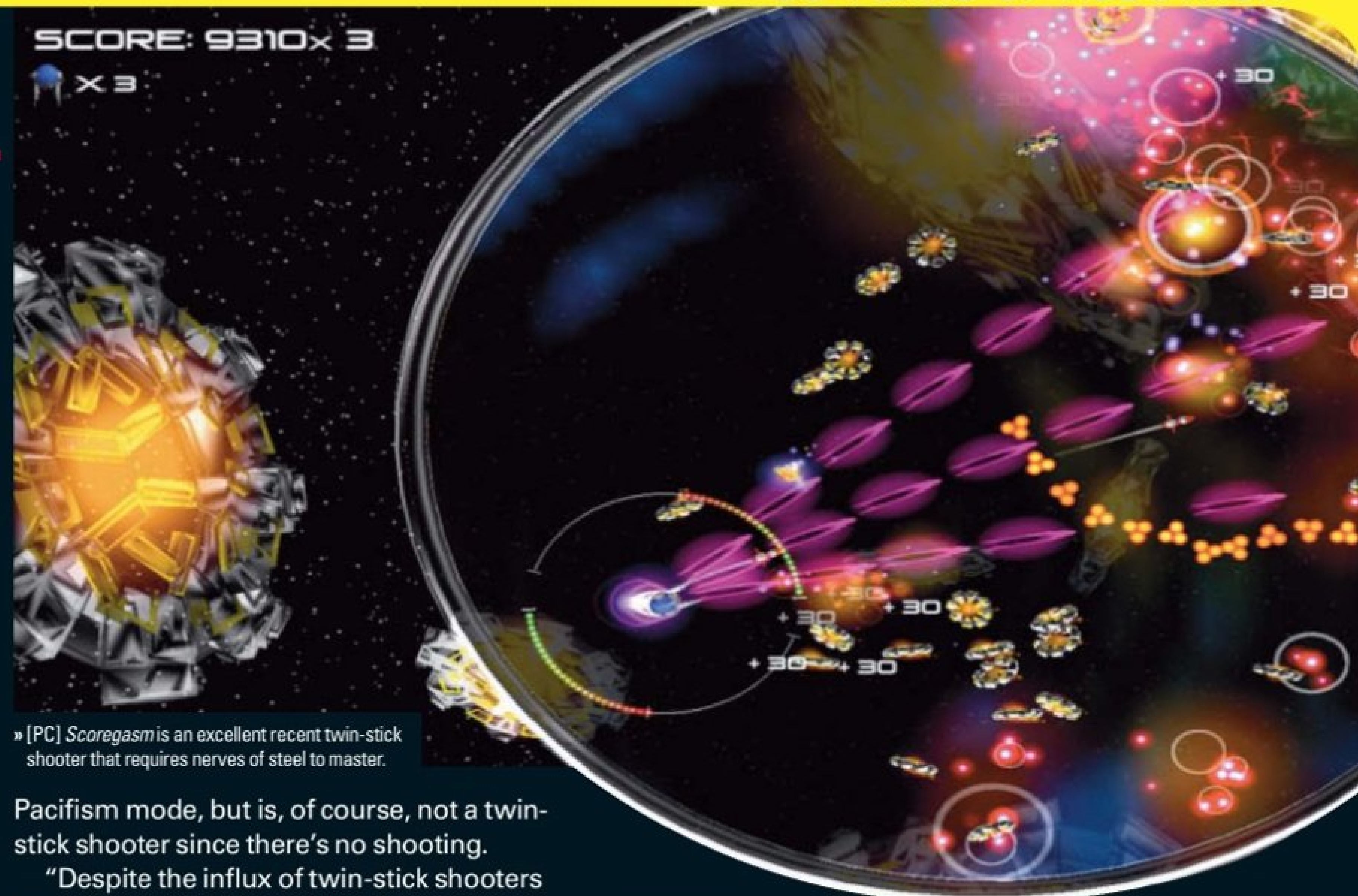
SUPER ZAXXON

For some reason, Sega saw fit to make the sequel to its hit isometric shooter scroll at roughly twice the speed, making slamming into a wall or missile less a threat, more a foregone conclusion. The claustrophobic tunnel sections only serve to make things even trickier. Suffice to say it wasn't nearly as popular with arcade goers as the original.

it being an influence, it's the essence of every twin-stick that followed, and my own are no exception. *Bullet Candy*, my first commercial game, started life as a fairly dull clone before I realised that it'd be more fun to put my own spin on it. More recently, with *Scoregasm*, I guess in terms of the game's structure and pacing the influence is more diluted, but the essence is still there for all to see."

"I was a huge *Robotron* fan, but was hugely let down by the Genesis version," says Radiangames' Luke Schneider. "Without the dual joysticks of the arcade version, the immediate and visceral connection to the action was severed. I picked up a PlayStation with a DualShock for *Metal Gear Solid*, and its real influence on me was instilling a strong desire to create a dual-stick shooter. Trying to replicate *Robotron* on dual-analogue sticks isn't wise, though, because the eight-way directionality is so important to the design, and analogue sticks aren't eight-way.

"When I started Radiangames, my first game had to be a twin-stick shooter. *JoyJoy* was released in 2010. Since then, I released two other twin-stick-influenced games, *Inferno* and *Ballistic*, with enhanced ports of those two titles. And then there's *Fireball*, which was directly influenced by twin-stick legend *Geometry Wars 2*'s



» [PC] *Scoregasm* is an excellent recent twin-stick shooter that requires nerves of steel to master.

Pacifism mode, but is, of course, not a twin-stick shooter since there's no shooting.

"Despite the influx of twin-stick shooters from both myself and other developers, there's still a couple of unique things about *Robotron*'s design that still makes playing the arcade version special today: the eight-way directional focus and the 'everything spawns in at once' wave design. Those elements combine with the authentic 8-bit era sound effects and graphics to create a game that will remain a classic forever."

Developer Puppygames is unleashing a whole trilogy of *Robo*-influenced twin-stick shooters, starting with *Ultratron* for the Xbox 360 and PC. "*Ultratron* was a very traditional eight-way movement, eight-way shooting, *Robotron*-esque game," says coder Caspian Prince. "*Ultratron 2* added the now-ubiquitous mouse-to-aim controls. For *Ultratron 3*, we're throwing in a bunch of old arcade memes in order to liven it up somewhat. We've got dots to gobble, which earn money to spend on upgrades. We've got pets that you buy in the shop between levels, which follow you around and help zap the enemies in one of three distinctive ways. And lastly we're un-evolving the level spawning away from the *Ultratron 2* style of constantly spawning enemies, making it more like contemporary titles such as *Mutant Storm*."

With the current resurgence of games utilising the dual-stick mechanic, from *Super Stardust Delta* to *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light* and *Minotron*, and dozens of quality PSN, Xbox Live Arcade, Xbox Live Indie and iOS titles to choose from, there's never been a better time to celebrate the twin-stick shooter. "I love that developers today are inspired by classic titles like *Robotron* and *Smash TV*," says Eugene proudly, "and new-generation hits like *Geometry Wars* have pushed the dual-stick shooter genre to new frontiers of fun…"

ROBO LOVE



STEVE WOITA (QUADRUN)

"While I was at Atari, I would take breaks that involved walking to the very back of the building, which had a small arcade that included many classics, one of which was *Robotron*. I found that this was the only videogame that I actually got exercise playing, and I always felt great afterwards. The bonus chain design was awesome and had a pinball scoring way about it – the first collection was 1,000, then 2,000, 3,000, 4,000 and 5,000 points thereafter. If you died or ended the wave, it would reset to 1,000 points for your next pickup. This design element was brilliant. It was just magic."



05

FLYING SHARK

Modern shooters are designed so nearby enemies won't fire on you, giving players a sort of survival buffer. Toaplan's early shoot-'em-ups, which also include *Twin Cobra* and *Truxton*, feature baddies that have a habit of firing mercilessly, even if they're right on top of you. The result? Much cursing, angry clattering of joysticks and very little change left in our pockets.



06

JOUST 2

Joust 2 was a victim of circumstance, being designed as a kit conversion for arcade cabinets with vertical monitors, the most common at the time because of the ubiquity of *Pac-Man*. While the original used a horizontal screen, giving you plenty of warning of incoming enemy buzzard attacks, the sequel's restrictive field of vision made for a far tougher game.



07

R-TYPE

The *R-Type* games, alongside Konami's *Gradius* titles, are renowned as some of the most punishing shoot-'em-ups ever created, requiring superlative reflexes and the memorising of large chunks of their level layouts to even have a remote chance of seeing them through. *R-Type*'s famous mothership is not for the faint-hearted, and the rest of the game is harder still.



08

GHOSTS 'N' GOBLINS

The *Ghosts 'N' Goblins* series as a whole is notably difficult, but the original is probably the hardest of the lot – even the opening stage requires pixel-perfect timing and a high degree of skill just to make it to the first boss. Adding insult to injury was the fact that Capcom made you play through the game twice to reach the true ending and rescue your sweetheart.

ROBO EVOLUTION

20 games with a debt to Eugene Jarvis's classic blaster



BLACK WIDOW

With a twin-stick control scheme hijacked from *Robotron*, Bruce Merrit's underrated vector-graphic blaster tasks players with keeping a series of webs clear of marauding enemy bugs. *Black Widow* is fast, fluid and compelling, and as with *Robotron*, it's a game that ideally requires playing on an original arcade cabinet to fully appreciate its genius.



WILD WEST HERO

Along with the authorised conversions, a number of third-party clones made their way onto home computers in the Eighties. Paul Holmes' *Wild West Hero*, released on the ZX Spectrum, was one of the finest. Atarisoft obviously thought so too, signing up Paul for the official Spectrum *Robotron* port, which sadly never materialised.



SLIMEY'S MINE

Simon Pick's quirky C64 shooter, a sort of cross between *Robotron* and *Pac-Man*, sees our frog-like hero zipping around caverns, zapping nasties and collecting jewels. It's extremely good fun, doubly so because of its hilarious sampled sound effects, with baddies that emit gurgling screams on dying, accompanied by shouts of, "Got him!"



CRYSTAL QUEST

The first game to support full colour on the Mac, *Crystal Quest* was a mouse-driven title where players guide a sphere around the screen, collecting crystals while avoiding or shooting enemies. The action gets hectic on later stages where enemy numbers approach *Robotron* levels, and bullets ping dangerously around the arena.



LLAMATRON

Jeff Minter's loving *Robotron* pastiche dials down the rabid difficulty, and the result is a considerably more genteel offering with a liberal sprinkling of hairy Minter touches. Bouncing bullets, smart bombs and herd bonuses are just some of the goodies on offer, and you can even Blu-Tack two joysticks to the floor for the full arcade-style experience.



ROBOTRON X

Midway's 1996 3D revamp features super-enhanced hero U-Gene (geddit?) strapping on his blaster to fight a range of familiar enemies along with some all-new bad guys. It's a decent effort, with faithful 3D re-creations of foes and those famous shattering explosions, but the in-game camera can be a little disorienting at times.



GUN SPIKE (AKA CANNON SPIKE)

Developed by shooter king Psikyo in collaboration with Capcom, *Gun Spike* was a NAOMI-based arcade game that appeared to draw heavily from *Smash TV*. It features a variety of selectable heroes from previous Capcom arcade games, including Mega Man, Arthur from *Ghosts 'N' Goblins*, and Cammy from the *Street Fighter* series.



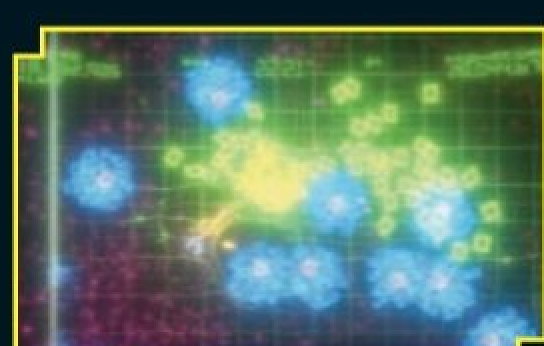
GEOMETRY WARS

Starting life as an Easter egg in *Project Gotham Racing 2*, *Geometry Wars* is probably the most well-known of the games that led the resurgence of twin-stick shooters. More free-form in design than *Robotron*, its glowing visuals and spectacular particle-based explosions were reminiscent of vector arcade games like *Asteroids* and *Tempest*.



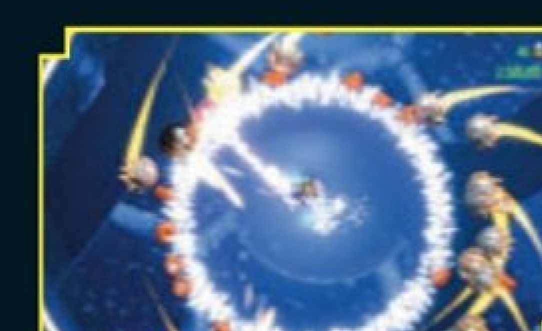
MUTANT STORM

Another of the early games of the 'twin-stick revival', *Mutant Storm* displays plenty of evidence for *Robotron* being a major blueprint, in the same way its predecessor, *Space Tripper*, channelled *Defender*. An updated version, *Mutant Storm Reloaded*, was later released for the 360, while this original release recently made its way to iOS devices.



GEOMETRY WARS: RETRO EVOLVED 2

The mini-game proved popular enough for Bizarre to release a sequel, *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved*. The second sequel was even better, and included modes like Pacifism, in which players have no weapons, and enemies can only be killed by flying through gates.



BLAST FACTOR

One of the first twin-stick shooters available for the PS3, *Blast Factor* features a concept pinched from Sixties sci-fi flick *Fantastic Voyage*, although sadly no Raquel Welch. Basically, you're stuck inside a body in a tiny ship, and the game revolves around battling hostile viruses and ridding surrounding cells of hostile infections.



EVERYDAY SHOOTER

Released on PC and PSN in 2008, this unique title, created by Jonathan Mak, is described by its author as "an album of games exploring the expressive power of abstract shooters". Against a soundscape of crunching guitar riffs, the game makes frequent visual nods to *Rez*, *Centipede* and *I, Robot*.



I MAED A GAM3 WITH ZOMBIES IN IT!!!

Despite its stupid title, *I MAED A GAM3* is a decent *Robotron* clone, with zombies, natch. The most impressive thing about this XBLIG title is how many it has sold – over 300,000 have blasted zombies and been driven nuts by the annoying background song to date.



BEAT HAZARD

This mash-up of *Super Stardust* and *Robotron* has a neat gimmick, allowing you to use your own music, from which the game spawns its own unique levels. But be warned: it features some of the most over-the-top strobe effects ever seen in gaming. If you thought *Space Giraffe* was a bit too in-your-face, you might want to give it a miss.



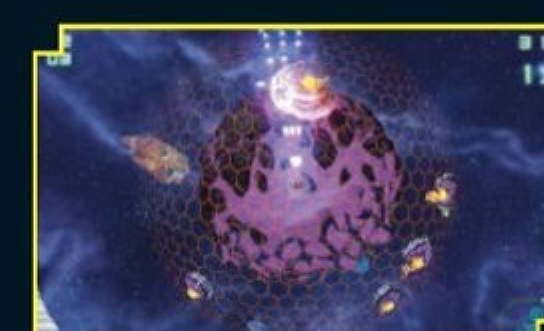
SCOREGASM

Charlie Knight's follow-up to *Bullet Candy* mixes Jarvis with trippy, Minter-esque visuals to create a game that's a bit tasty. Played across a branching, non-linear galaxy, creating a different experience each time, *Scoregasm* flings baddies, bullets and scoring opportunities at you thick and fast, and is a welcome addition to the genre.



BALLISTIC

Indie developer Radiangames' debut release was a twin-stick shooter called *JoyJoy*. *Ballistic* carries on the tradition, being a lovely-looking blaster with an interesting weapon system and a surprising amount of depth. Those with 80 Microsoft Points to spare could do a lot worse than heading over to Xbox Live Indie Games to give it a go.



SUPER STARDUST DELTA

Released on the Vita, this remarkably pretty game was the second twin-stick shooter in the *Super Stardust* series, following the acclaimed *Super Stardust HD*. The visual hook of both games is the rotating 3D 'planet' that spins below your ship as you move, scrolling orbiting asteroids and hostiles with it.



P-3

BatCat Games' innovative shooter sees you piloting a nano-ship in a Petri dish setting, striving to protect a central nucleus. One clever touch is the ability to use up the life force of the nucleus to give yourself a weapons boost, turn your ship into a projectile, or release a devastating shockwave. But take care: if the nucleus dies, it's game over.



ULTRATRON

Ultratron is a *Robotron*-esque twin-stick shooter, sporting attractive neon graphics and a variety of nifty power-ups. The opening stages are a little leisurely, but it doesn't take long before the game starts throwing ambush levels and bosses into the mix to add to the merriment. Best of all, the 360 version can be had for just 80 Microsoft Points.

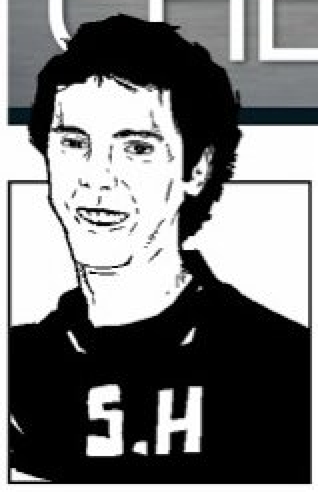


MINOTRON

With 2010's *Minotaur Project*, Jeff Minter announced a return to the quick-fire production values and arcade-style purity of his classic catalogue. *Minotron* is a re-imagined take on *Llamatron* for iOS, with sprites lifted directly from the Atari ST original, and the return of old favourites like 'screaming Mandy' – the homicidal floating Mandelbrot.

CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAPASCHIPS



If there's one thing we've learnt about retro gaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you really want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune to procure, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than five English pounds…

STREET RACER

INFO

- **SYSTEM:** SUPER NES
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** MEGA DRIVE, PC, GAME BOY, PLAYSTATION
- **RELEASED:** 1994
- **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
- **DEVELOPER:** VIVID IMAGE



We always hate stating the obvious at Retro Gamer, but *Super Mario Kart* was a bit of a success story for Nintendo. The developer's most successful racing franchise, it encouraged countless clones and spawned a whole racing sub-genre that we refer to as the 'kart racer' genre, or 'mascot racer' (if it stars mascots).

Street Racer was one of the first and most successful *Mario Kart* clones to emerge during the 16-bit era. And though it graced the PlayStation, Sega Saturn and a few other machines, it enjoyed most of its success on the Super Nintendo, where it also debuted.

Ostensibly trying to blend *Mario Kart* with *Street Fighter II* (the title clearly a pun on *Street Fighter*), this cheerful looking kart racer pitted eight larger-than-life characters against each other across 24 circuits. These circuits were themed around the racers themselves (like stages in *Street Fighter II*), and played out across three different Cups of differing difficulties, although unlike *Mario Kart*, the individual Cups share stages and are simply comprised of more races the higher their difficulty.

Street Racer's karters included a cuddly looking sultan, a Frankenstein's monster, a Penelope Pitstop-alike, a shaven-headed guy on loan from *Power Drift*, a World War I pilot with a bushy grey handlebar moustache, the sumo wrestler stereotype sprite (see Edmond Honda), an imposing looking village chief and finally a black leather jacket-wearing male model. Each had their own set of attributes, kart and signature attacks, and with a tap of the shoulder buttons could hit out at rival racers, *Road Rash*-style. And to accompany the fisticuffs they also had an energy bar that caused them to slow down momentarily when it was depleted.



» [SNES] The 16-bit console versions featured four-player multiplayer via a multi-tap, the PS version went four better with eight players.

While the circuits of *Mario Kart* were primed with speed boosts and pads that offered a (fairly) random system of doling out power-ups, the tarmac of *Street Racer* was far less inventive. The tracks were littered with stars, which could be collected to earn bonus points, spanners to boost energy and bombs that depleted it.

Though nowhere as imaginatively designed as the likes of Ghost Valley 1 or Bowser Castle 3, they were still fun to peg around, even if they were a little on the short side. And once the Cups were beaten players could customise their own, enjoy some furious four-player racing courtesy of a multi-tap, or play two bonus games: a battle mode that saw players battling in an arena track, or a soccer mode in which racers competed to score the most number of goals. It's just a shame that both modes feel a bit tacked on and are not as enjoyable as they should be.


» [SNES] With the PS helping usher in polygon racing with *Ridge Racer*, *Street Racer* did disappointingly on the console.

Street Racer is a solid and entertaining kart racer, one that does enough things differently to *Mario Kart* to feel like a decent racer in its own right. It's also good value as it features a nice selection of modes and can be picked up for a few quid these days.

THE RACERS

Hodja



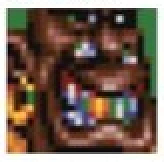
Hodja has good handling and acceleration, his special attacks sees him electrocute other racers and his kart become a magic carpet.

Frank



With good strength and acceleration, Frank the monster can also summon a ghost to scare rival racers, and take to the skies with batwings.

Suzulu



The tribal leader has powerful attacks and good acceleration too. His kart is equipped with a spinning battering ram.

Biff



Another racer with strong attacks, Biff clobbers his opponents with a baseball bat and can increase the width of his tyres.

Raphael



A good all-rounder with solid speed, attack and defence stats, Raphael deafens his competition into submission with his sound system.

Surf



Whipping opponents with her beach towel, and capable of inflating her kart, Surf has excellent handing and solid stats in all other areas.

Helmut



The oldest racer in the competition, Helmut has good defence and handling. His kart also turns into Red Barron's Tri-Plane.

Sumo San



With good speed, neat handling and attack, Sumo San is a solid racer. His ride is a chunky tank that emits a zappy electric current.


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THE MAKING OF

Major Havoc

Major Havoc threw everything at its luminous vector screen and made it stick. Owen Rubin chats with Stuart Hunt about his epic arcade game medley, the best Atari vector game you've probably never played

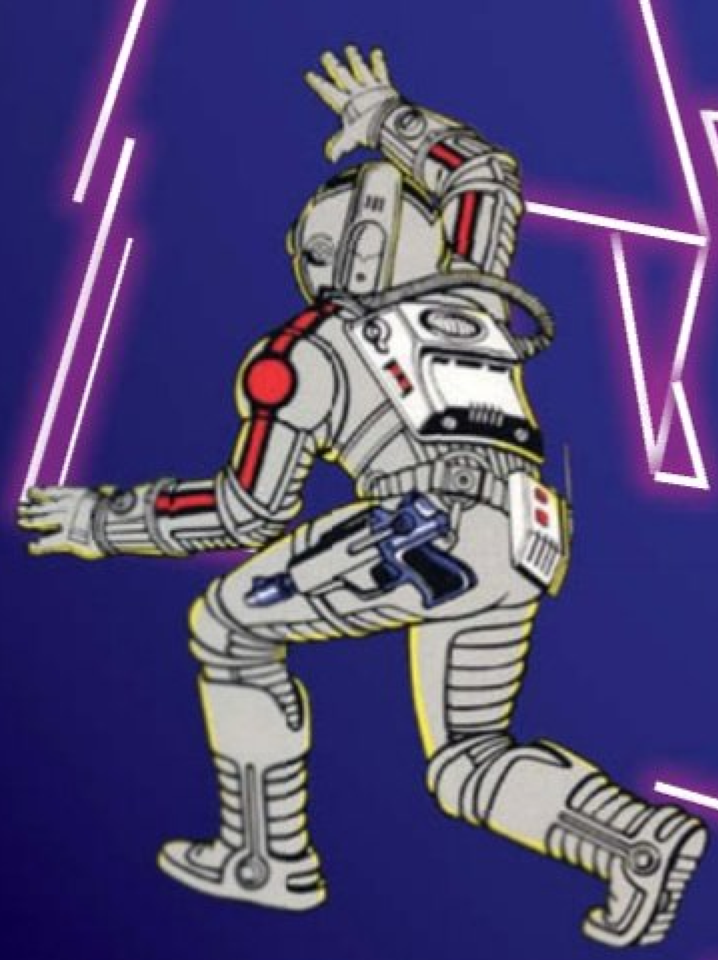
One of the most ambitious vector games ever created, *Major Havoc* is best described as a 'best of' of arcade classics. Its gameplay comprises a jam of familiar styles inspired by everything from *Pac-Man* and *Star Castle* to *Galaga*, *Breakout* and *Gravitar*. Yet despite its long list of videogame inspirations, *Major Havoc* went pretty much under the radar following its release.

It shipped at a time when arcade operators were beginning to tire of temperamental vector monitors, which would frequently break down and cost a lot of time and money to fix compared to other machines. Orders for *Major Havoc* suffered as a result and it wasn't a big seller for Atari. It never received a sequel and it never even had a home conversion either, a pretty rare thing for an Atari arcade game. Had the Major landed on Earth a year earlier, or even later, after *Star Wars* reignited the popularity of vector games, there is little doubt he would have enjoyed more success. A game with humour, variety, dazzling vector visuals and gameplay, with something for everyone, there were few boxes that *Major Havoc* didn't tick.

Major Havoc was primarily the creation of Atari programmer Owen Rubin. While studying Engineering at UC Berkeley in 1975, Owen discovered *Pong* and, like many people, found it fascinating. At the time he was writing programs on a Metaphor, a computer system connected to a graphical workstation that emulated other computers, and after seeing the famous ball and paddle game in action he began toying with the idea of making simple videogames. That same year Owen and his classmates were visited by Intel and shown its 4004 microprocessor. This visit led to the class being assigned a project in which a 4004 was hooked up to an oscilloscope and they were tasked with making it draw something, anything.

"I did *Pong*," remembers Owen. "I actually had little switches and you could move little paddles up and down, and the ball would move back and forth. I didn't have a score because the scope wasn't fast enough to draw it, but I did *Pong* and that's when I said 'This. I want to do this. This is so cool'."

When senior year came around, companies flocked to the campus and began scouting students for employment. Among them was Atari.



> "I worked my way into the interviews. All the slots were full, but one person didn't show so I got their spot"





» [Arcade] *Major Havoc* started out as a very different game altogether, one based on the *Star Trek* episode *The Tholian Web*.



» [Arcade] Lyle Rains and Mark Cerny contributed to *Major Havoc*: Lyle created the graphics in the game and Mark worked on some of the space waves, including the 'flying fish' wave.

"I worked my way into the interviews," smiled Owen. "All the slots were full, but I just hung out and one person didn't show so I got their spot. I was invited down to Atari and interviewed, and they turned me down. They thought I was interviewing to be a hardware engineer because I had a split major, hardware and software, and I wanted to be a software engineer. I called them back and explained, I went down the next week and they hired me on the spot. I think I was the fourth or fifth software engineer hired. And that's how I got into Atari."

The first game Owen created for Atari was *Cannonball*, which saw players fire a person from a cannon with the aim of getting them through a hole in a wall. Disappointingly, it never shipped, although the concept would later provide the basis for the Atari 2600 game *Human Cannonball*. Owen's next project was the parachutist-landing sim *Skydiver*, his first project which did ship. This was followed up by *Orbit*, a *Spacewar!* clone he was asked to render in raster graphics because at the time Atari didn't have a vector generator, and *Tunnel Hunt*, a spiritual precursor to Ed Rotberg's popular combat racer *STUN Runner* that saw players racing down impressive-looking raster tunnels while shooting down TIE Fighter-style enemies. Owen was then asked to take over the early rendition of *Space Duel*. Sharing similar gameplay with *Asteroids*, *Space Duel* swapped the breakable space rocks for animated abstract shapes, and featured a popular cooperative two-player mode in which two ships are tethered together and players have to work in unison for a combined score.

"The interesting thing about *Space Duel* was that it was supposed to be the first colour vector game, the first colour *Asteroids* game," explains Owen. "But when *Asteroids Deluxe* was green lit Atari decided that they couldn't do two versions of *Asteroids* at the same time so they gave the hardware and some of my code to Dave Theurer for *Tempest*. So some of the vector code I helped develop is in that game in the background."

Though this battle of the *Asteroids* sequels had a hand in Theurer's vector masterpiece, Owen's next game would prove just as career-defining, even though at the time motivation at Atari wasn't at its highest.

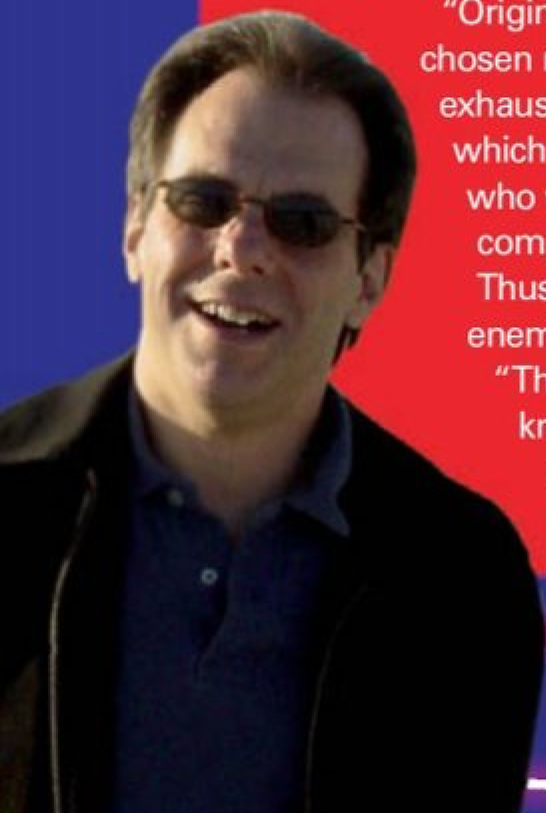
"It's an interesting game, *Major Havoc*, because I was having problems at that time," reveals Owen. "I was kind of fed up with Atari in general. The politics weren't great inside the company; a lot of friends helping friends. I ended up working for a guy, I won't mention names, but he was the world's worst manager. When they reorganised everybody, people got organised into his team and within a week six of them had left, five of them went to another group and one went to another team. I didn't want to stay either but they told me they had given the game to him so I had to stay. I quit the whole thing and basically came back to see it finished, but the environment was so bad there at that time."

Major Havoc started with title *Tollian's Web*, a name taken from an episode of *Star Trek* called *The Tholian Web*. In the episode, Kirk gets lost between dimensions and the crew of the Enterprise race to rescue him. However, the team

Owen on creating the story

Fans of Major Havoc who are also sci-fi buffs may have twigged that much of its story was inspired by *Battlestar Galactica*, which was really popular at the time and Owen was a big fan of. But this wasn't the only external influence to inspire Owen when he was working on *Major Havoc*'s story.

"If you look at the fighters that come out of the ship, they look like Cylon fighters. If you look at the displays that are drawn on the Tactical Scan screen, even the way the name Major Havoc is drawn on the screen, they look like an old Tectronixs vector display. Tectronixs was an electronics manufacturer who made storage scopes and other displays used in the show.



"Originally I also put credits in the game, but Atari didn't allow it. I had chosen not to go to the game conference that year just because I was exhausted, so when most of the company were gone I wrote this story which included puns based on DEC (Digital Equipment Corporation), who was a big computer manufacturer of the era. We used their Vax computers for compiling and their headquarters was in Maynard. Thus in the story of *Major Havoc* the homeworld is Maynard and the enemy is the evil Vaxxian Empire.

"The whole story was based on these tongue-in-cheek puns. I don't know if they ever got that, I don't think they ever cared. But there's a reason behind it. I had to take the credits out and thought what am I going to put in this big scrolling piece of memory?"

THE MAKING OF

encounter a species called the Tholians who regard them as hostile and order them to leave the space area. When the crew refuse, the Tholians begin spinning an energy web around the ship to tractor it from its position. Owen felt this scenario was perfect to base a game around.

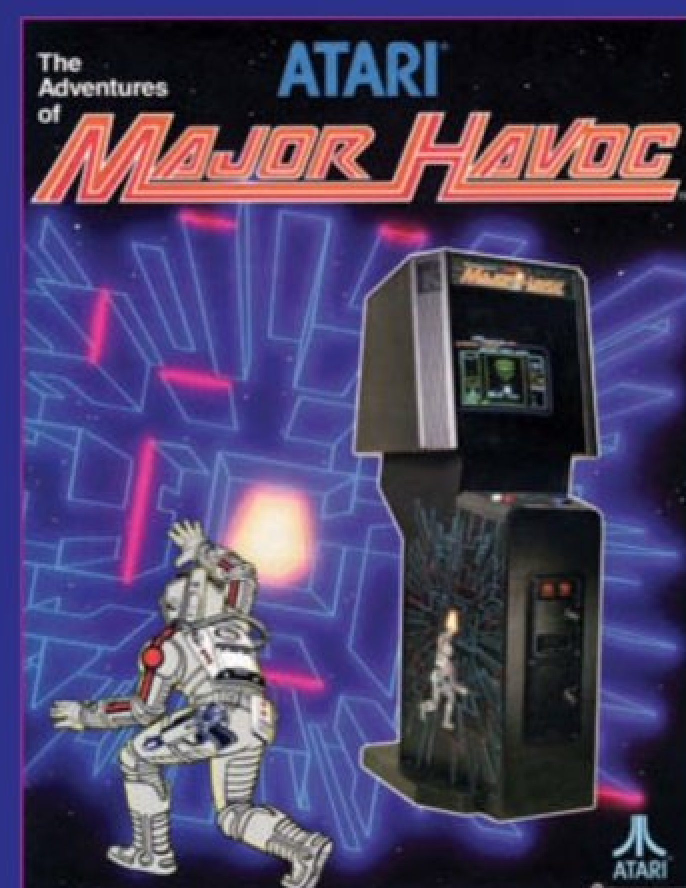
"I always liked the idea of this web, so I talked to the hardware engineer and said I wanted to do this game where these things would come down and spin webs on the screen in an over-the-shoulder third-person view, so you were detached from the ship. You had to fly the ship through the web and had to shoot down the spinners. That's what it originally started as. Everybody looked at it and said it was cool, but it needed more, so I set it aside for awhile."

It was then that Lyle Rains, vice president of engineering at Atari, came to Owen with a suggestion. Owen remembers the conversation well.

"Lyle said 'What about a maze character? Something that runs through a maze?' So he drew some characters, he did the actual artwork for *Major Havoc*, and I played around with doing this little animation routine, which we actually looked at patenting at the time. It's the way everybody does animation now, which is kind of funny. I created this animation where you could make this character walk, jog, jump, and do all these different things and then I built a maze around him. This sort of became the maze wave and then I decided to set it in space, and that's sort of where *Major Havoc* came from. The original name was actually Rex Havoc, as in Wreaks Havoc."

A year into development and Owen began designing and developing the

> I developed some things that people have never seen, and I wish we could find the old code



space waves for the next section of the game, but not all made it into the finished game. "I developed some things that people have never seen, and I wish we could find the old code," says Owen. "In the fourth wave there are these red lines that fall with spaceships flying. That was originally the *Star Castle* wave. That spaceship that shows up on the top of the screen would appear with shields around it and as you hit the shields they would fall. What you had to do was destroy the shield and of course it would start firing at you just like in *Star Castle*. But to make it harder, it launched spaceships as well. So you had to avoid and shoot the ships, shoot the shields and shoot the guns. It was an incredibly fun wave but it took about six minutes to complete, and unfortunately an arcade game was supposed to be on average 90 seconds beginning to end, so it ended up getting pulled out."

With Atari deciding that more maze waves were needed, programmer Mark Cerny (*Marble Madness*, *Sonic 2*) was brought in to help Owen get the game finished. "Mark created the first flying fish robot wave – which was very funny, we loved the humour in that – and then he created the last four or five maze waves, the ones I still can't get through, the hard ones," smiles Owen.

Within eight months *Major Havoc* was finished. It had taken Owen 18 months to create and gone through two different prototypes: the first being the aforementioned *Tollian's Web* and the second called *Alpha One*, which had a number of minor differences to the sound, story and graphics of the finished game. Being so ambitious in its design, Atari had big hopes that *Major Havoc* would be a success, but it shipped during a difficult window for vector games.

"I think *Major Havoc* would have done a whole lot better if it wasn't a vector game. The arcades were just not buying vector games any more. It took *Star Wars* to get vector games back into amusement arcades. People had had enough of vector



» [Arcade] Though *Major Havoc* never received a home port back in the day, in recent years, through various Atari compilations and re-releases, it has graced iOS, Xbox 360 and DS.



» [Arcade] Havoc has a lot of veiled animations, from putting his arms out if he's perched on the edge of a platform to tapping his foot if you leave the controls alone (like Sonic).





» [Arcade] Owen is a massive *Battlestar Galactica* fan, and many of the elements, notably the look of the Catastro-fighter and Vaxxian ships, were inspired by the show.



» [Arcade] It's a shame that *Major Havoc* never received the regognition it deserved, because it's a truly fantastic little game that's full of variety.

monitors constantly breaking and having to fix them and I think it was at that point they said that was enough."

The release and popularity of *Star Wars* in arcades shortly after *Major Havoc*'s release only overshadowed the brilliance of the game more, pushing it further back in the minds of arcade operators and patrons. Vector games were hot once more, but it was *Star Wars* that everyone wanted. Despite this though, *Major Havoc* went on to enjoy a cult following, particularly in recent years. And it's easy to see why.

It is a game for gamers, a celebration of arcade classic all tied together into one game that still manages to feel innovative. You'll find few vector games that contain as much imagination and variety. Indeed, you get a sense that Owen crammed everything he possibly could into *Major Havoc*, a feeling you don't get that often from arcade games, which are traditionally built to be simple, challenging and short-lived thrill rides. Even the Tactical Scan screen that flashes up between waves to offer you details about the next stage famously featured its own mini version of *Breakout*.

"That was a bet, by the way. I had like 86 bytes left in the ROM and I said I wonder what I can do with that. So someone said 'Why don't you make another game?' and then we laughed and I said 'Well, wait a minute. With the routines I have in the ROM already, I bet I can make a mini-*Breakout* game', so my challenge was to squeeze a *Breakout* game into the game and that's really how that got in there.

"*Major Havoc* was really a collection of games, it really was. It had elements of *Pac-Man*. It had a space shooter/*Galaga* feel to it. It also had a very obnoxious sense of humour, which I tend to have, that really showed up there. It wasn't new but it was trying to take these elements and make them *feel* new. That was really the goal there, to make them feel different."



» [Arcade] Owen on why Havoc doesn't carry a weapon: "We used to have this thing at Atari of no guns. I didn't think about it at the time but it was rare, what game by Atari had a player with a gun?"



» [Arcade] The difficulty curve and variety of *Major Havoc* is superbly pitched, it constantly drops new things into the mix to raise the challenge and keep it feeling varied.

"I think Major Havoc would have done a whole lot better if it wasn't a vector game. The arcades were just not buying vector games any more"

The Jaguar sequel that almost was

Though *Major Havoc* wasn't a huge seller for Atari, it sold well for a vector game at the time. We were curious as to find out from Owen whether Atari ever pondered a sequel?

"Not the original Atari. When Atari Corporation came up with the Jaguar they contacted me and said it wanted to do a sequel and asked if would I be willing to work on it. I said yes, but I wanted some money up front and they wouldn't agree and so it never happened. I wasn't aware of anyone else at Atari doing a sequel. I wanted to do a sequel. In fact, I have a company called Edison Labs, we do technology consulting for companies, and one of the things we want to do are games on iPhone. So I got a meeting with Atari in New York and said I wanted to recreate *Major Havoc* for the iPhone and iPad. I wanted to rebuild the whole game and add new additional waves and the ending I had written. There's a message during one wave in *Major Havoc* that says 'Keep playing, the homeworld is near', and we initially intended to have a home world after every four waves. You were going to land on a planet rather than dock with a spaceship. We were going to have all the enemies you fought so far attack you and the maze wave would've been a giant plant manufacturing robots and spaceships and you'd have to set off four reactors in a very specific order to destroy it. They thought this was a great idea, so I gave them a modest budget, but they kept cutting it down, so finally I just told them I wasn't interested at the ever-lowering price."



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Core GAMING

As the Apple II hits 35, Craig Grannell looks back at the system's gaming roots and then-unprecedented consumer focus, the machine's importance within the history of videogaming, the developers who made the machine sing, and the all-important games themselves

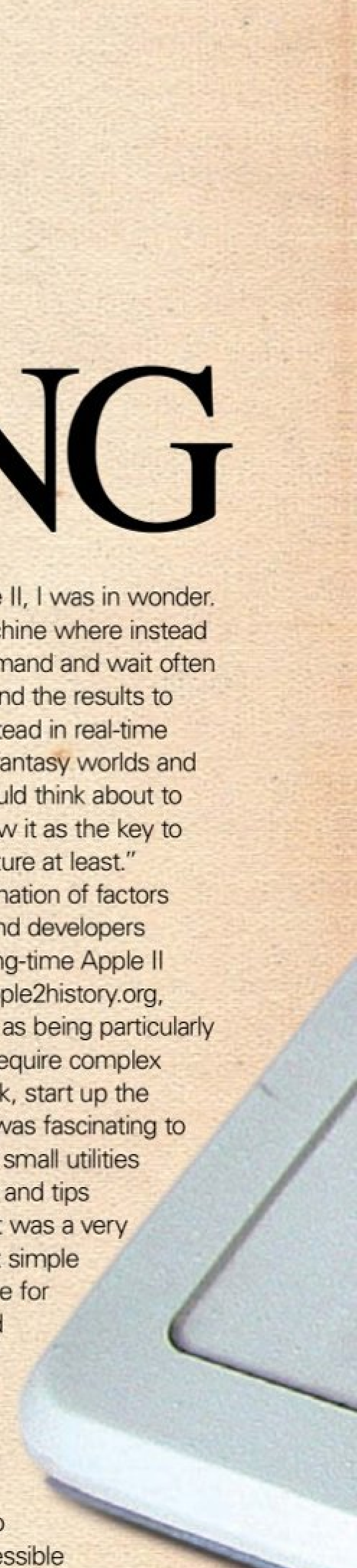
In recent years, Apple revolutionised computing through the Mac and iOS devices. Gaming is also rapidly evolving now, in part due to the iPhone and iPad. For those who remember more than a decade of concerns about a doomed, beleaguered Apple – especially in gaming, where Apple users would consider themselves 'lucky' to pay full price for titles already consigned to bargain bins on the PC – this probably came as a bit of a shock. But it shouldn't have; Apple's history is in some ways built on gaming foundations through its earliest consumer machine, the Apple II, which revolutionised home gaming in the USA.

For those who grew up battling teletype machines, the Apple II was almost magical. "It was so far ahead of its time that photographers setting up an image of the future would include an Apple II in the shot, because it honestly looked like it came from the future, not the present," remembers Trip Hawkins, entrepreneur and founder of Electronic Arts. "It was a superior and elegant design. A patented power supply meant no fan was required, so there was no noise. It was the first machine with colour and bitmapped graphics, and it was easy to add peripherals."

Richard Garriott, who would later create *Ultima* on an Apple II, was similarly fascinated by the machine. "My exposure to computers and trying to write games on them pre-dates the Apple II. I discovered in high school a teletype connected with an acoustic modem to a PDP-11 in a neighbouring university's data centre. It was the only terminal in the school, and I was fascinated," he remembers. "But when I saw my first Apple II, I was in wonder. Suddenly, here was a machine where instead of having to invoke a command and wait often minutes for it to process and the results to be printed out, it could instead in real-time visually display to me the fantasy worlds and other fantastical ideas I could think about to program. I immediately saw it as the key to the future – or my own future at least."

It was a winning combination of factors that drew in enthusiasts and developers alike. Steven Weyhrich, long-time Apple II user and webmaster of apple2history.org, remembers the computer as being particularly approachable: "It did not require complex skills to pop in a floppy disk, start up the Apple II, and explore it. It was fascinating to see what it could do, with small utilities I discovered, or with tricks and tips learned from magazines. It was a very capable computer, and yet simple enough that it was possible for an individual to understand everything about how it worked."

Bill Budge, renowned programmer and the creator of *Pinball Construction Set*, was also a fan of the Apple II's accessible nature: "It was architecturally very simple and open. A program could essentially take over the entire machine. Clever people could make it do amazing things that probably weren't foreseen by Wozniak." Bill was also excited by the Apple II's colour capabilities, which swayed him from buying a TRS-80; such thoughts are echoed by others.





“For those who grew up battling teletype machines, the Apple II was almost magical”



Robert Woodhead – co-creator of Apple II classic *Wizardry: Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord* – says: "It was the first machine that had decent graphics capabilities. At the same time, it was simple enough that you could hold a model of the entire machine in your head – Apple II programmers knew everything about the platform." *Lode Runner* creator Doug Smith is similarly enthusiastic: "From an assembly language standpoint, you had full control – from the start address, you could do anything and everything from that point on."

Inevitably, 'anything and everything' often meant 'make games'. "That was largely a function of the fact people desire entertainment, and that interactive entertainment is, at least potentially, much more fulfilling than something passive, like television. The Apple II was the first, affordable way to realise that potential," thinks Michael Cranford, creator of the Apple II hit *The Bard's Tale*. "For me, this was my first experience with any computer, so the idea there was a box that could function as an automated 'gamemaster' was exciting. It was this idea that was magical – that a game could be created that would run automatically, that could be programmed to approximate a human moderator. This way, I could conceivably program a game and then play it myself."

However, the quirky nature of Apple II hardware meant the ability to master the entire machine was almost a necessity. *Choplifter* creator Dan Gorlin remembers there was no way to make sound effects other than with the CPU, and so everything had to stop while a sound was being made. "But you had absolute control over timing, and so you could polish such things perfectly – something that with later systems became a real challenge." Robert says figuring out clever ways to get the machine to do things was part of the fun: "The classic example was Wozniak's hack of using software to do all the expensive stuff needed to run a floppy disk controller, so the hardware was very simple and cheap… and then his re-hack that increased disk capacity entirely via code changes!"

Richard remembers the challenge and reward of dealing with graphics, due to the Apple II having an illogical backwards bit order (which reportedly enabled Wozniak to save a chip): "I'd draw a tile on graph paper, convert seven bits of it into binary, reverse the bit order, decide what colour bits I wanted to assign to it, and that would give me a 16-bit number for the top row of that tile. I'd convert that into hexadecimal, and type that directly into the memory of the computer, and then do the same for all 16 rows of the tile. Next, I'd write code to copy those 32 bytes into the right 32 bytes of what I hoped was the screen area, and then I'd see what happened."

If things didn't turn out as expected, it could be tough to figure out what had gone wrong. "It was as brute force as you could possibly imagine," says Richard. "But here's what's so profoundly important that came out of that: you were so careful at each point to make sure you didn't waste anything." He explains that he was forced to figure out designs for a solid tile of grass that could be repeated but not obviously show patterns, and to create interesting coastlines when there wasn't space for variations.

These working methods might sound archaic, but Richard believes they're still useful. "With the latest *Ultima* games, I'll find my team needing to make tiled graphics for the outline of an island, and suddenly my 35-year-old skills become pivotal to the art department, because no-one knows how to build a minimal tile-set that will work together and tile appropriately nearly as precisely as I do. I find it very interesting that every cycle of games, my old Apple II skills bubble back up to the surface!"

Interestingly, even at the time, few Apple II developers were irked by what now appear to be severe limitations and quirks. "I never found the Apple II restrictive, but then the first computer I had access to was a high-school Hewlett-Packard with 4 KB of RAM and a single LED display with 20 characters," recalls Doug. "So getting my hands on an Apple II just made me think 'Wow' about everything I could do with it. I liked the fine detail and enjoyed taking the time to optimise my code to be as efficient as possible."



» Before *Ultima*, there was *Akalabeth*. And before modern packaging, this was what your brand-new game looked like.

Michael, too, claims it never occurred to him that the Apple II might be restrictive: "This was simply what it was. As we proceeded with development, we'd come up with ways like swapping chunks of code into and out of memory, to make the game operate like it had more memory, or we'd develop our own high-speed disk OS." In Michael's opinion, having no limits – much like modern computing platforms – is actually more restrictive. "Sometimes having a fixed, limited canvas is an inspiration to something greater. If you have no limits, it's difficult to know how to push things and inspire people."

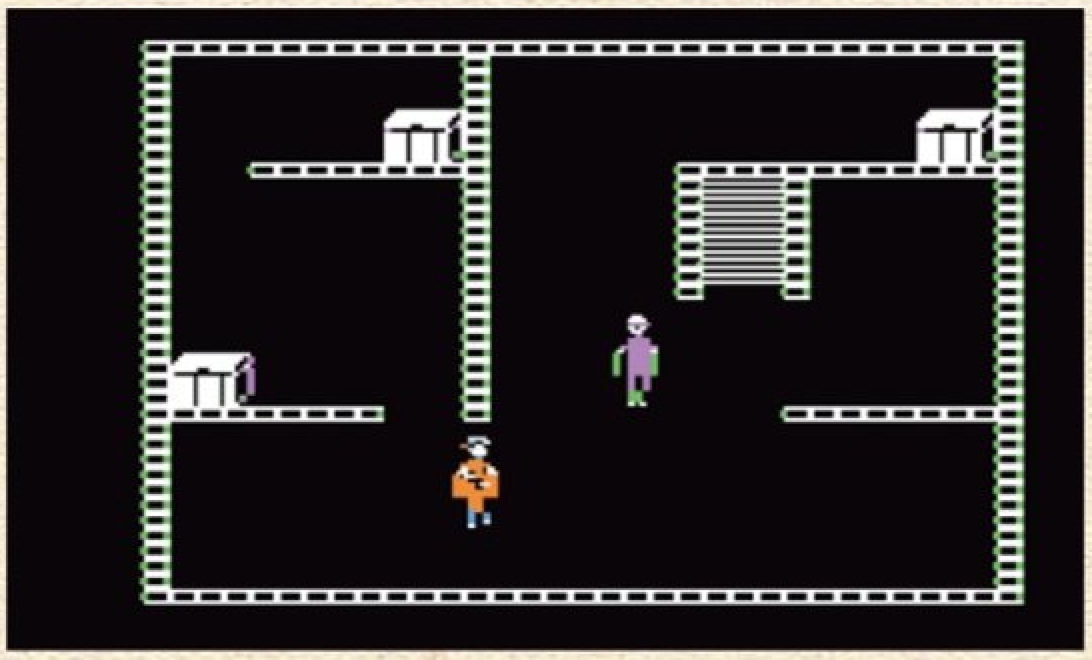
In the case of *The Bard's Tale*, limitations inspired adding music. "It was like, 'What cool thing can I do to put some music into this game? Wait, I will connect it to a character class, and make that his spell!'" Michael reminisces. "Music was infantile on the Apple II, but the ability to run it as a background process was the thing that inspired me to tie it directly into the game content."

According to Brian Greenstone, Pangea Software CEO, resource limitations combined with a knack for resourcefulness had the knock-on effect of showcasing the talents of Apple II game developers. "Back then, any computer had serious resource limitations, and so it wasn't anything you worried about. But Apple II game programmers pushed hardware to its limits and learned new ways of optimising performance. They were considered the best programmers in the business, because they were the ones who really knew how to get every cycle of performance out of a CPU and how to efficiently store data in small spaces."

Another beneficial side to the Apple II's restrictions was, according to id Software co-founder John Romero (whose first game was on the platform), forcing programmers

"You were so careful to make sure you didn't waste anything"


» It's Richard Garriott's *Akalabeth*, playing on Richard Garriott's Apple II, in Richard Garriott's office! Squee! (Photo: David Swofford.)


» [Apple II] Sneak around, get shouted at by Germans, and avoid getting shot in *Castle Wolfenstein*.

10 Apple II firsts & exclusives

1 Raster Blaster
Year: 1982
Publisher: BudgeCo



Richard Garriott of *Ultima* fame told us Bill Budge's work was "so far ahead of anyone else that it appeared to me as magic". *Raster Blaster* was Bill's first pinball game, created as a response to the pinball craze that had taken over Apple, his place of employment. With amazing speed and collision detection, *Raster Blaster* was followed up by *Pinball Construction Set*.

2 Bilestoad
Year: 1982
Publisher: Datamost



Marc Goodman's fighting game is a great example of ambition on the Apple II. Despite the system's lack of technical might, Goodman crafted a top-down hack-and-slash, with brawling 'meatlings' battling in virtual reality. "*The Bilestoad* was difficult to control, but was the first top-view, two-player, axe-wielding, fighting game," enthuses Brian Greenstone.

3 3D Docking Mission
Year: 1978
Publisher: The Elektrik Keyboard



For a couple of years, Chris Oberth was a prolific games creator on the Apple II, fashioning demanding arcade experiences. *3-D Docking Mission* isn't actually in three dimensions; instead, it provides top and side views and has you rapidly dock with a mothership, avoiding the nasty space rocks en route. The viewpoint is reminiscent of *Sanxion* on the C64.

4 Airheart
Year: 1986
Publisher: Brøderbund



Having had a hit with Cold War-era rescue effort *Choplifter*, Dan Gorlin's next Apple II title pushed the hardware as far as it would go. It riffed off the earlier game, but shifted everything to 3D, scaling sprites in real-time. The basic theme and engine was reworked on the Atari ST, becoming *Typhoon Thompson In Search For The Sea Child*.

5 Deathbounce
Year: 1982
Publisher: n/a



Nearly lost forever, *Deathbounce* was found during the rescue of *Prince Of Persia*'s source code. Reportedly created after a direct *Asteroids* clone was pulled due to Atari's legal clampdown, it's like a simplified version of Atari's game, combined with *Omega Race*. It can be downloaded for free on Jordan's blog: www.jordanmechner.com/blog/2012/04/deathbounce.

6 Gorgon
Year: 1981
Publisher: Sirius Software



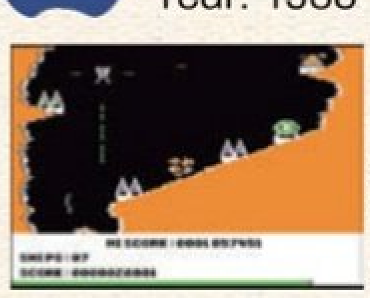
Nasir Gebelli was one of the early stars on the Apple II, fashioning experiences that more or less brought home popular titles from the arcades (albeit not in a licensed sense – this was the early Eighties, after all). *Gorgon* is his take on Williams' classic *Defender*, with demonic-like aliens menacingly lurking, trying to capture the few humans carelessly wandering around.

7 Bolo
Year: 1982
Publisher: Synergistic Software



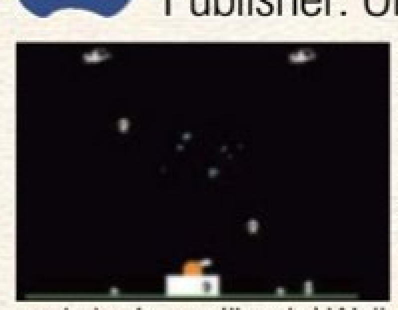
Tanks, mazes and shooting things were mainstays of early videogames, and Bolo brings these things together with aplomb. You crawl through a maze, seeking out and destroying bases spewing out enemy tanks, all the while keeping an eye on dwindling fuel reserves. The game is brutal – any collision with projectiles, walls or tanks costs a life; but newly-generated mazes each time you play provide limitless fun.

8 Cavern Creatures
Year: 1983
Publisher: Datamost



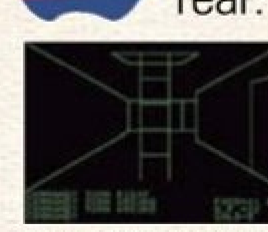
Paul Lowrance's shoot-'em-up is what would happen if you tipped *Scramble* on its side and ramped up the difficulty level to 'sadistic'. Your gun has a three-way blast, but those two extra guns over typical retro shooters are scant consolation for regular death while exploring crazily tough caverns. One for people who can indefinitely play *Dropzone* while simultaneously watching TV.

9 Sabotage
Year: 1981
Publisher: On-Line Systems



Retro Gamer readers must all be familiar with classic game *Paratrooper*. (If not, nip off now and play it – we'll wait.) Well, *Sabotage* got there first, introducing the classic turret-versus-paratrooper-and-helicopter battle and tough scoring system (lose a point for every shell fired). Let four of the little blighters land and they get all athletic, build a human pyramid and blow up your turret, the rotters.

10 Akalabeth: World of Doom
Year: 1979
Publisher: self-published/ California Pacific Computer Co.



Richard Garriott was making RPG *Akalabeth* (complete with first-person underground dungeons) for his own amusement when his boss at ComputerLand said it was better than what they were selling. A year later, the game had been sold locally and nationally, putting the young programmer through college and sowing the seeds for *Ultima*. *Akalabeth*'s only port was to DOS, as part of 1998's *Ultima Collection*.

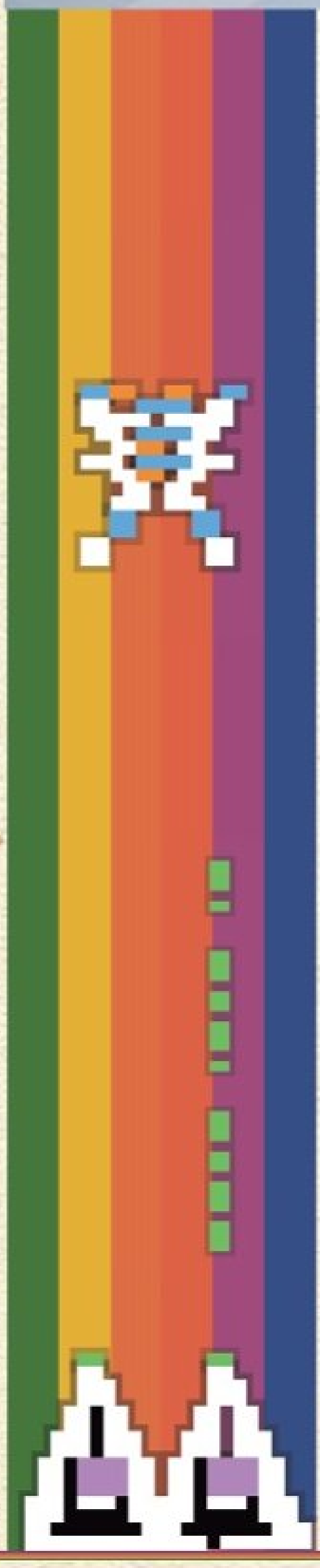


to figure out their own ways to achieve desired effects. "Later platforms had built-in hardware for graphics and sound, but many games looked similar, because they relied on that technology. The Apple II had no hardware for that, so programmers had to invent their own ways of getting graphics on the screen." John says you could look at a game and immediately tell who wrote it, due to the technique. "That's one striking way the Apple II allowed you to really express your creativity with a very open canvas."

This suggestion finds favour with Doug. "At the time, we didn't have the internet, and so what John says is pretty true – everyone had to solve problems their own way," he affirms. "The biggest obstacle with the Apple II was not having any sprites, and you had to do a lot of fine bit manipulation. Things were not byte-aligned, so you had to come up with creative ways to get things on to the screen."

The solo nature of most Apple II games creators also played a role in adding personality to its games. "In those days, it just didn't make sense to make games a collaborative effort," thinks Michael. "The restrictions of the platform, plus the nature of the development environment, more or less dictated solo efforts." He says a third party was used for artwork on *The Bard's Tale 2*, and a friend composed the music, but even then the design and storyline remained his creation.

"So there is a lot of me in there. It's the same with, for example, Stephen King novels: there is a lot of personality, his signature, because it is his creation and inspiration. Novels by collective individuals couldn't be as interesting. But today's videogames are collective enterprises that make it hard to differentiate the stamp of individuals. Creativity by consensus rarely results in anything great, in my opinion." Brian identifies with that, and thinks the Apple II marked a high point regarding creativity: "We weren't trying to do 'more realistic' versions of an existing game. We were trying to come up with something new, and that was easy to do, because nothing had been done – it was *all* new!"



Such effort and innovation wasn't lost on Apple II enthusiasts at the time. Ken Gagne, editor of Apple II magazine *Juiced.GS*, recalls being gripped by *Castle Wolfenstein*. "SS Stormtroopers would shout German commands as they barged into a room, and then chase the player through the castle! Although the game doesn't fit the 'survival horror' genre, it was my first experience of a game that could scare me." Steven adds that many of the best games were memorable because they were valuable. "When that $25 to $50 was spent, by God I was going to *play* that game! Where possible, I'd try something out first at the computer store, and I'd know from trying it that it was great."

> **"Without the Apple II, Ultima wouldn't exist"**

Those who created the games also often found themselves immersed in nascent virtual worlds, often inspiring them to craft their own. Michael remembers many long nights playing *Wizardry*, which became the inspiration for *The Bard's Tale*: "The weaknesses in the game were rather blatant to me, but the things about it which were great made me want so much more. I was determined to do my own version." Trip remembers getting a perfect score in *Choplifter* as "very emotionally satisfying", and he spent many hours finishing *The Bard's Tale*. Richard recalls being wowed by Bill Budge's technical prowess and Nasir Gebelli's ability to craft fun games. "I thought Budge's work was so far ahead of anyone else that it appeared to me as magic. I could not conceive how he was pulling it off. I thought I was an expert with the Apple II, but then I'd look at Budge's 3D work and developer kit, and I was in awe. I had no conception of how he managed with that computer to pull off those effects. So technically, he was my guy… but Gebelli was just making games that were much smaller than mine in scope and they were really playable and fun!"

Richard, of course, created perhaps the most famous Apple II game of them all: *Ultima*. So we ask if the Apple II was instrumental in that game's creation, or if it was inevitable and would have arrived through other hardware. "Without the Apple II, it would never have existed," he claims. "As much as I enjoyed the teletype that came before, and the machines from around the same time as the Apple II, like the TRS-80 and C64, I found them all harder and less fulfilling to tear into."

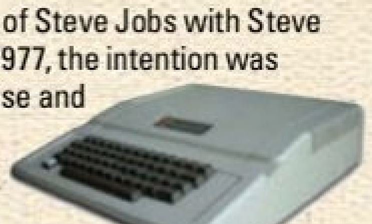
And the hobbyist culture that had sprung up due to the Apple II being both approachable

EVOLUTION OF THE APPLE II

1977

Apple II

The original Apple II married the marketing savvy of Steve Jobs with Steve Wozniak's engineering genius. First sold in June 1977, the intention was to make an appliance-like computer, hence the case and friendly keyboard; but within was an expansible machine, with high-res colour graphics and basic sound, making it suitable for gaming.



1978

Apple II Europlus/Apple II J-Plus



Showing Apple's international machinations, versions of the II+ were subsequently created for markets in Europe, Australia and Japan. These were based around the US II+, but had amended power supplies and video output (PAL for Europe and Australia, requiring an extra video card for colour output), and added support for Katakana in Japan.

1979

Apple II+

The original Apple II shipped with a meagre 4KB of RAM, but the II+, which arrived in June 1979, increased this to 48KB. This was also the first Apple II to include Microsoft-authored Applesoft BASIC, although most programmers on the system would eschew BASIC for machine code.



1983

Apple IIe

One of Steve Wozniak's obsessions was reducing chip count, hence the Apple II's curiously complex means of dealing with on-screen graphics (from a software developer's standpoint, at least). Embodying similar thinking, the IIe reduced components, but also added features, such as the ability to display lowercase letters.



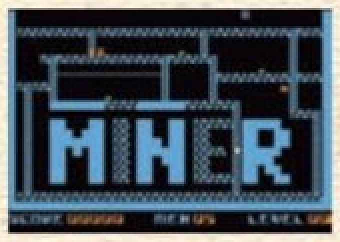
and flexible had created the ideal conditions for people like Garriott to flourish. "The owner of the store I worked in saw me working on *Akalabeth*, an Apple II translation of a teletype role-playing game I'd written, but with first-person dungeon corridors instead of a top-down view. He remarked it was better than anything we were selling, and that I should publish it."

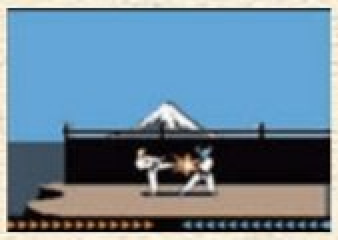
On investing "all the money I'd earned in my life – about two hundred dollars" in printed cover sheets and instruction manuals, *Akalabeth* was initially sold in the store and then nationwide. "This was for a game I hadn't considered publishing – there was no story, no 'winning' and no end. It wasn't written for the public – it was just my own technical demo. Based on its success, I thought if a game I never intended anyone to see, play or pay for could put me through college, surely I can start over with a game for public consumption and do a better job… and thus *Ultima* was born."

Ultima is a rare example of an Apple II series that survives to the present day, but success stories like Richard's were fairly commonplace at the time. Steven reckons in the early days this was down to a lack of competition: "In the US, the Apple II's only real equivalent competition was the Commodore PET and TRS-80, and although most original Apple IIs only had four-to-16 KB of RAM, they were made to be expandable and had the benefit of colour."

Even as the Apple II was surpassed by Atari and Commodore machines, it remained popular through a huge installed user-base and the machine's business and educational abilities. Now, 35 years on, one might argue the Apple II is only truly popular with those hankering for nostalgia. "That comes down to simplicity," thinks Michael. "People aren't always looking for a complex gaming experience – it's the

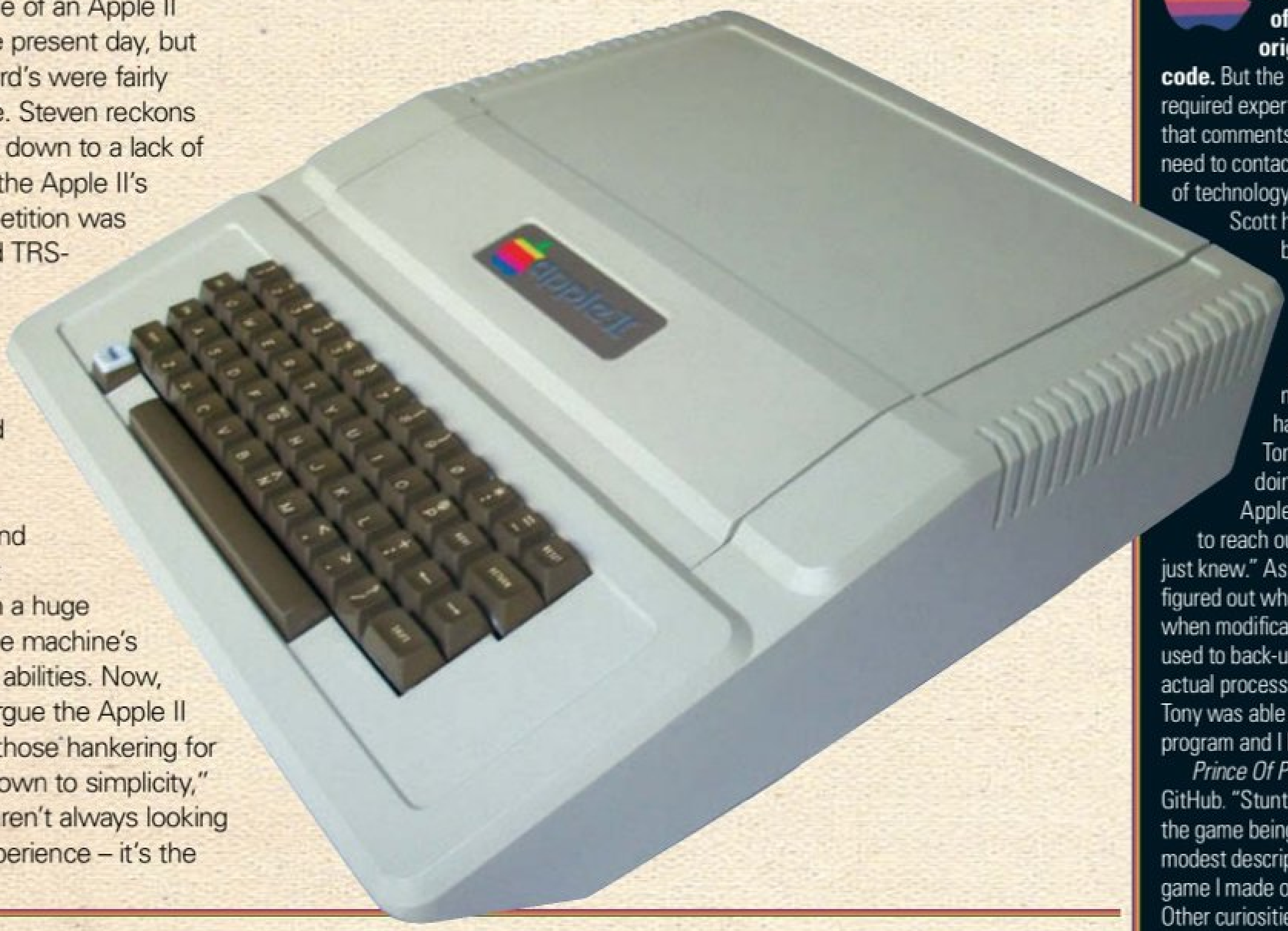




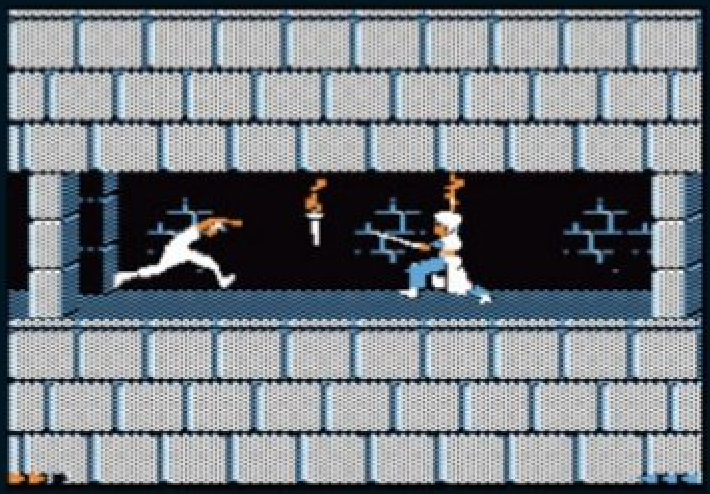




» [Apple II] Turn-based trading game *Taipan!* was an early Apple II hit (despite being written on the TRS-80). Here, we're valiantly (read: stupidly) attacking 20 pirate ships.



SAVING PRINCE OF PERSIA



» [Apple II] The classic *Prince Of Persia*, where the prince has waded into battle without a sword, the idiot.

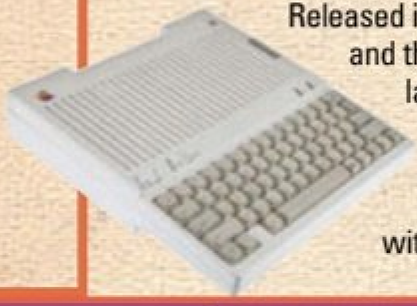
In March 2012, Jordan Mechner reported his dad had found a box of disks at the back of a closet, which appeared to include the original Apple II *Prince Of Persia* source code. But the disks were fragile and getting at the data required expert help. "I've made my name available enough that comments under Jordan's post were saying 'Oh, you need to contact Jason Scott'," says archivist and historian of technology Jason Scott (textfiles.com). Coincidentally, Scott had a connection with the Mechners, having been friends with Jordan's brother, recognising him and his old high-school in subsequently released *Prince Of Persia* reference footage.

Scott flew to LA and brought local Apple II collector Tony Diaz on board, along with *Wired* magazine, to ensure people would know what happened. "I'll take credit for knowing to call Tony and making sure people knew we were doing this, but Tony – an unbelievable expert of Apple II – took the disks and instead of me having to reach out and figure what some of this was, Tony just knew." As an example of Diaz's credentials, he correctly figured out when Mechner's Apple II had been bought and when modifications had been made, along with the program used to back-up the *Prince Of Persia* data. "As a result, the actual process of extraction went very quickly, because Tony was able to look at the material and say 'We need this program and I have it right here'."

Prince Of Persia's source code was rescued and put on GitHub. "Stunts get attention, and there's something about the game being 'just another piece of code', and Jordan's modest description – 'A running-jumping-swordfighting game I made on the Apple II' – was hilarious," says Scott. Other curiosities were also rescued, including a long-lost Brøderbund clone of *Tetris* and two of Mechner's pre-*Karateka* games. Scott thinks saving old games is important for various reasons; in the case of Mechner's disks, the older games enable people to understand where he came from, and because Mechner was burned by poor conversions of *Karateka*, *Prince Of Persia* is extremely well commented, providing insight into Apple II coding techniques.

However, Scott adds the chance to save old data is vanishing fast: "This episode wasn't just about *Prince Of Persia* – it was to educate people that this stuff has value and people should make an effort to save it. The hardest part of history is to be there when it happens. Computer history, this nascent move where we suddenly computerised and put life online, is a critical moment in human history that literally changed how people are. Society will catch up, but we don't have relative time. Old books and paintings can be found in attics, but computer mediums are unbelievably flaky and short-lived. If something lives 20 years, it's a fluke. If we don't move forward on archiving everything, we're going to lose it all. And while some people debate its value, I feel we don't even have time to debate any more – we've even lost that."

1984 Apple IIc



Released in April 1984, the IIc had a carrying handle and thus claimed to be portable – despite it lacking a built-in display and storage. The white colouring and lack of expansion slots foreshadow more recent Apple kit, but the IIc at least balanced its more closed nature with a RAM bump, to 128KB.

1986 Apple IIGS



The biggest shake-up in the Apple II range occurred with the IIGS. Released in 1986, it took the line into the brave new world of 16-bit architecture, and enabled a staggering 8MB of RAM to be installed. However, the IIGS was doomed to a slow death through Apple's focus on the Macintosh.

1988 Apple IIc Plus



The last of the Apple II line was a revamp of its so-called portable, the IIc. The IIc Plus provided users with a faster chip, replaced the 5.25-inch floppy drive with a 3.5-inch one, and could run Apple II software faster than the IIGS. The machine was only ever officially available in the USA.

1990 Apple IIe Card

In 1990, the Apple II line was on life support (Apple pulled the plug a couple of years later), but users demanded the ability to run software from the system on Macs. Hence, Apple released the 'computer on a card' IIe Card, which sadly was often slower than a real IIe.



Images courtesy of Jonathan Zufi, Shrine Of Apple (shrineofapple.com)

Biting the Apple

Developers who started out on the Apple II



STEVE JOBS

The Apple co-founder had basic engineering savvy, but his real skill was in realising what people wanted from technology. It was his vision to "create the first fully packaged computer," hence the Apple II, which moved Apple on from being merely a hobbyist concern. Jobs was instrumental in the creation of the Macintosh and iOS devices.



STEVE WOZNIAK

The engineering genius behind Apple and the creator of the Apple II's innards. It was Wozniak's efficiency that kept costs down by using fewer chips, but unlike Jobs he was also a keen gamer, hence the Apple II gaining colour, sound and other things important for creating games.





TRIP HAWKINS

Originally an employee of Apple Computer, Trip left in 1982 to found Electronic Arts. Although revenue soon became reliant on the C64 and Atari, early EA hits included Apple II titles, and the business plan was written on that machine.



JOHN ROMERO

Best known as the co-founder of id Software, John cut his teeth on the Apple II. His first game, *Scout Search*, was published in *inCider* magazine, and id hit *Wolfenstein 3D* was named after an Apple II game.



JOHN CARMACK

Another id co-founder, John had an early brush with Apple IIs and the law when he was arrested for helping some kids steal Apple computers from a school. He later worked on Apple II GS publication *Softdisk G-S* before moving on to the PC.



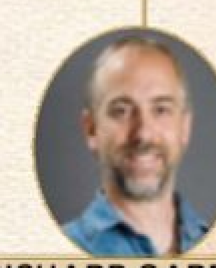
JORDAN MECHNER

Best known for *Prince Of Persia*, Jordan says "I'd been learning about silent film techniques in my history of cinema classes and so I needed to produce something that was visually amazing. The Apple II was equipped to do that."



MICHAEL CRANFORD

Michael is best known to Apple II users for creating the sensational *The Bard's Tale*, which was released by Electronic Arts. He followed it up with a popular sequel and also coded *Donkey Kong* for the Apple II.



RICHARD GARRIOTT

Creator of the *Ultima* series, which he still works on today, Richard was a fan of the Apple II right from the start, largely because of the level of control it afforded. "It really was possible to truly master the entirety of the machine," he says.

SIRIUS SOFTWARE

The epitome of the US boom-and-bust Eighties videogames cycle, Sirius Software initially found fame and fortune largely through Nasir Gebelli's hugely playable arcade games, such as *Defender* clone *Gorgon*. Despite riding high, the company became a victim of the US videogame crash when Fox Video Games failed to cough up over $18 million in royalties. Gebelli later produced early *Final Fantasy* games.

BRØDERBUND

One of the most prominent Apple II publishers of the early Eighties, Brøderbund gained a reputation for high-quality software. Notable releases included *Choplifter*, *Lode Runner* and *Prince Of Persia*. Towards the end of the decade, the company's interest shifted away from games towards education and productivity software, and Brøderbund was eventually bought out by The Learning Company in 1998.

BUDGECO

As with many programmers in the early Eighties, Bill Budge realised he needed an outlet for his games, and so BudgeCo was born. It was a family operation – Bill wrote the games and his sister ran the business. As the market toughened, Budge readily accepted an approach from EA in 1983 to distribute his games, ending BudgeCo as an independent operation.

ON-LINE SYSTEMS/ SIERRA ENTERTAINMENT

On-Line Systems was founded by Ken and Roberta Williams in 1979, and early success was found through graphical text adventures like *Mystery House* and *Time Zone*. By the latter game's release in 1982, the company was renamed Sierra Entertainment, which became famous for *King's Quest* and other PC games. Bought by CUC International in 1996, Sierra was ultimately absorbed into Activision Blizzard.

SUBLOGIC

Although probably most famous for being where Bruce Artwick created his long-running *Flight Simulator* series, subLOGIC also released the fantastic *Night Mission Pinball*. Simulators rapidly became the company's bread and butter, though, and subLOGIC still exists today as a simulation company. In 1988, Artwick left (taking *Flight Simulator* with him), forming Bruce Artwick Organisation, which was later bought by Microsoft.

DATAMOST

Datamost had a decent run of games across a number of genres. Standout titles included sword-fighting game *Swashbuckler* and oddball overhead effort *The Bilestoad*, which featured two oversized warriors attempting to hack each other to death. The company's final titles were released in 1984, and it appears to have been another victim of the US videogame crash.

MUSE SOFTWARE

Founded in 1978, Muse is best known for Silas Warner stealth classics *Castle Wolfenstein* and *Beyond Castle Wolfenstein*. Founder Ed Zaron reportedly said a slump in the home computer market ultimately caused the company's fall, leading to a bankruptcy and subsequent buy-out in the late Eighties. The legacy of Warner's classics lives on in name, though, through id Software's *Wolfenstein 3D* series.

THE ELECTRIC KEYBOARD LTD

Another company showcasing the entrepreneurial spirit of early Apple II gaming, The Elektrik Keyboard was a computer/instrument store in Chicago. Anticipating the videogame boom, it started publishing and selling software by Chris Oberth, including *Depth Charge* and *Interceptor*. Chris went on to work for Stern Electronics, creating arcade games *Anteater* and *Armored Car*.

Steve Wozniak portrait courtesy of Michael Bulbenko

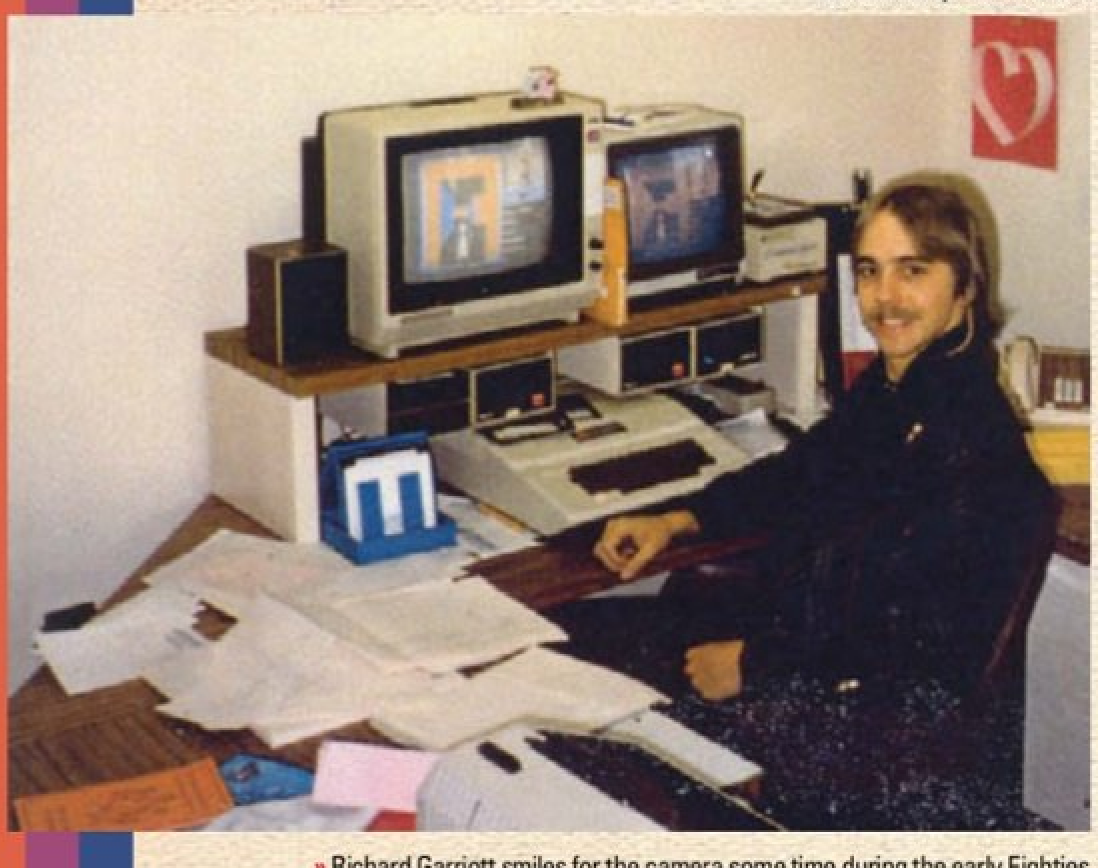




» Clever people continue to push the Apple II way beyond its original boundaries; here's Vince Briel's Apple II MP3 card, for playing back MP3s from a flash pen drive. (Photo: Andy Molloy)



» [Apple II] *Mystery House*, one of the earliest text adventures with graphics, but one of many with a house.



» Richard Garriott smiles for the camera some time during the early Eighties, taking a short break from crafting worlds on his Apple II.

reason many mobile games are so enjoyable. People tire of the gore, and many of today's games rely heavily on violence."

There appears to be a resurgence in Apple II use, especially in the USA, which goes beyond rose-tinted spectacles. Ken says *Juiced.GS* subscriptions and attendance at annual Apple II convention KansasFest have grown in recent years. In part, he admits this is down to people who grew up with the Apple II now being able to indulge in nostalgia, but there are other reasons.

"Music and fashion enjoy popularity cycles – kids discover their parents' tastes. Young people are discovering the Apple II for the first time, are enjoying it and are using it in ways we'd never have imagined." He refers to Melissa Barron (melissabarron.net), whose Apple II-inspired artwork has been shown worldwide, and yet Barron was only five years old when the last Apple II rolled off the production line. Ken believes the Apple II's relative simplicity compared to modern computers has resulted in a new generation challenging themselves to accomplish tasks on it that "require true genius".

Ken himself continues to keep the Apple II alive through *Juiced.GS*, now the longest-running publication dedicated to the platform and the only one still in print. "A retro-computer deserves a retro publication, and keeping *Juiced.GS* in print instead of online makes it unique," he says, proudly. "And while social networks are fine for disseminating Apple II news, our quarterly, hardcopy format lends itself to in-depth features and interviews – depth you may not find in a free blog post."

Elsewhere, others keep the Apple II alive in a rather more literal sense, as we discover when Richard Garriott reveals he has working Apple IIs in his office, playing his decades-old games. This was the result of writer Bruce Sterling remarking at a developer conference on the differences between writers and developers. Writers, he said, find it tough to write the best book ever, due to the sheer number that came before; but on succeeding, such an achievement could last decades. By comparison, developer skills and hardware evolve so rapidly that creating better games is potentially easier, but such a thing would never stand for long; worse, the machine to look at such a landmark game would soon disappear, and therefore the work could be forgotten.

"As soon as I heard that, it was a crushing blow to my ego. I was lucky enough to be there at the very beginning, and I wanted to think the things I'd created were worthy of being the best at the time," recalls Richard. "But this was before emulation, and at the time I already had no way to even look at *Ultima 1, 2, 3* or *Akalabeth*. My first four games were lost to me, and so on returning home, I inventoried what worked with my Apple IIs and went on a buying binge for spare parts to keep my machines operational!"

Like Ken Gagne, Richard isn't being purely nostalgic in his actions – he too believes there is value in keeping the Apple II flame burning. "Not only was it effectively the first, but it was capable enough to enable all the foundational principles of games to be explored – data compression techniques, tiled graphics, sound. It had a single speaker with a single bit you could turn on or off to put the speaker up or down, and that was it. But people discovered by modulating that back and forth very quickly, you could make sawtooth and sine-wave sounds. In these ways and others, the Apple II was just capable enough. But the language of game creation all happened on the Apple II, and so as you look back at those old games, you can see the imprints of that language being developed. Once an industry develops, the techniques are well understood; the artistry's still strong. But there's something about studying the original masters who developed those early techniques, and the hardware on which they worked."

Special thanks to Ken Gagne, Sheila Boughten, and David Swofford, and reader Ansgar Kueckes for his photography help.

Minority Report

This month we look at one of the best obscure platformers for the NES, applaud the TG16's Bravoman, resurrect a peculiar Japanese superhero from the Seventies, and get stranded on a desert island with only a deadly knight for entertainment. All in a day's work…



LITTLE SAMSON

■ SYSTEM: NES ■ DEVELOPER: TAKERU ■ YEAR: 1992

» NES



» [NES] *Little Samson* is a sizeable adventure, and despite the cute graphics is actually quite tough.

■ **We urge those with any hair and sanity left after playing through the *Mega Man* NES games and *Little Nemo: The Dream Master* to spend what's left on checking out this challenging platformer.**

Released exclusively for the NES, *Little Samson* tells the tale of a brave mountaineer, the titular Samson, who decides to become a local hero when his hometown gets invaded by a powerful sorcerer and his evil minions. Able to fire magic bells and call upon the help of four different beasts, Samson decides to set out, thwart the sorcerer and restore peace.

Samson is a pretty good all-rounder in terms of power, strength and agility. And being a mountaineer, he can fasten himself to walls to get around. The other, more interesting characters start off with a living stone statue that looks like a chubby knight, who unsurprisingly has the strongest attack in the game but poor agility. He's contrasted with a little mouse that can scurry up walls and is small enough to fit through small gaps, but has a tiny power bar and an awkward attack that sees him dropping little white bombs behind him. Finishing off the quartet is a fire-breathing dragon that can temporarily fly, naturally offering the best agility and proving very useful in boss battles.

To help you get accustomed to each character, the first four stages act as primers and can be played in any order. Once they are completed, however, level progression takes on a more linear structure, with the exception being that players can now choose between the four different

» SUPER NES



» KAMEN RIDER

■ SYSTEM: SUPER NES
■ DEVELOPER: SUN L ■ YEAR: 1993

■ **Based on a** manga and TV series from the Seventies about a college student who transforms into a motorbike-riding superhero grasshopper, *Kamen Rider* (aka *Kamen Fighter*) is a side-scrolling brawler with its tongue stuffed firmly in its cheek. The game sees you take on a terrorist organisation, which comprises mostly men in rubber monster costumes. Helping keep the action interesting, you can customise your attacks, and boss energy bars gradually expand during stages, so it's advantageous to eradicate the minions as quickly as you can. It's certainly one for fans of quirky beat-'em-ups.

» PC ENGINE



» BRAVOMAN

■ SYSTEM: PC ENGINE
■ DEVELOPER: NOW PRODUCTION ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **This colourful, fast-paced** platformer finds you playing the role of Bravoman, a chunky superhero who can hurl his head and limbs like a Slinky. Playing like the bastard child of *Dynamite Headdy* and *Sonic Blast Man*, your objective is to avoid dangers and punch enemies, which range from robots and ninjas to knife-throwing ladies and toy tanks. With 22 levels; some nice animation, particularly on Bravoman himself; cheery, arcadey visuals; a large assortment of whimsical enemies; and even some side-scrolling shooter sections complementing the run-and-gun stages, *Bravoman* is certainly worth investigating.

» APPLE II



» THE BILESTOAD

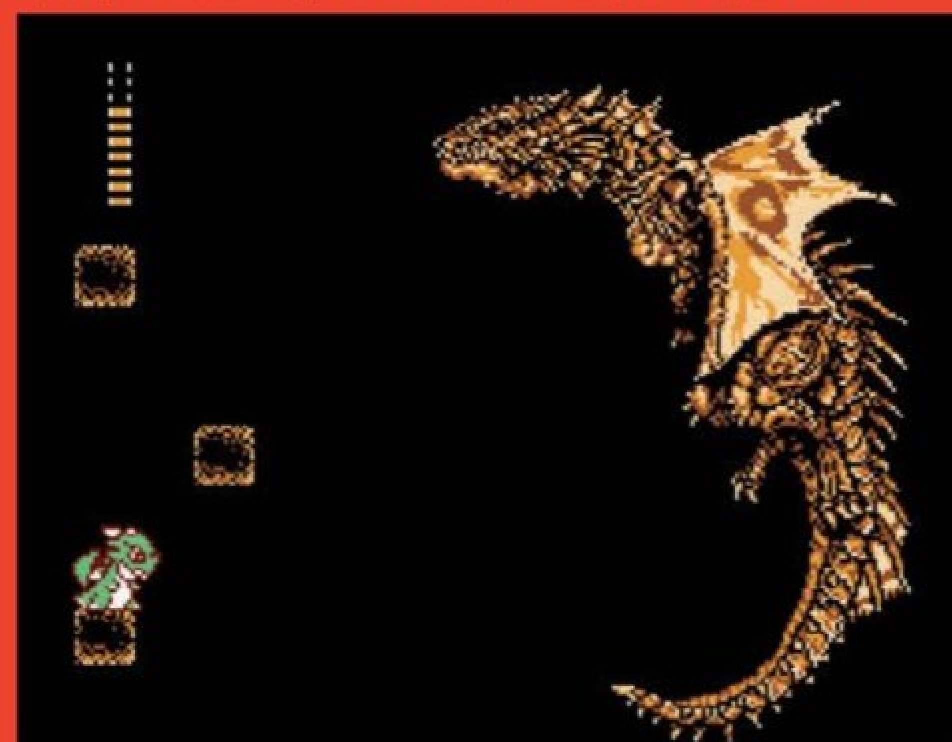
■ SYSTEM: APPLE II
■ DEVELOPER: MARC GOODMAN ■ YEAR: 1982

■ **The Apple II** isn't known for fighting games, but *The Bilestoad* isn't typical of the genre. With the combat always viewed from an overhead perspective, two knights – dubbed 'meatlings' – duel each other on a mysterious island. Both armed with an axe and a shield, you control one of the knights and must kill the other before he does the same to you. Three maps at the side of the screen show the location of both knights on the island and so add an element of strategy to the battle. With neat blood splat effects and an expansive fighting environment, *The Bilestoad* was a unique and atmospheric fighter.

» [NES] Graphically, *Little Samson* is among the most impressive games on the NES.



» [NES] The creature designs are wonderfully detailed, particularly the bosses.





» ABOUT THE SYSTEM

- Released in the US in December 1994, *Wario's Woods* was the last ever release for the NES.
- The Famicom/NES originally retailed for ¥54,800, $199.99 and £149.99 in various countries.
- The system's bestselling game was *Super Mario Bros 3*, with more than 17 million copies sold.

characters on the fly. Samson can swap between them at any point via the pause screen, and as well as distinct characteristics and powers, each has their own health bar. Therefore, if one character is down to their last bar of energy, it's crucial that you switch them out before they snuff it to avoid game over.

Released at the time when the 16-bit consoles were hitting their stride and taking the limelight, *Little Samson* proved that there was still plenty of life left in the humble NES, but sadly paid the price for its gallant heroics with disappointingly low sales. Visually it's up there with some of the most technically impressive games on the machine, boasting not only intricate sprites and imaginative enemy designs – including a selection of imposing bosses, some of which fill most of the screen and have multiple forms – but also some stunning levels, which are designed in such a way as to ensure that players frequently get to utilise each creature's unique set of abilities along the way. It's also fun, challenging and a fairly lengthy adventure, with progress retrievable via a password system.

It's a real shame that *Little Samson* never got more recognition on its release, as it's a real hidden gem. As such, for those NES owners who were keen to either sell or ignore their older consoles to make an early start on the next gaming generation, it is usually viewed as a curious entry on 'essential NES games' lists, if it's remembered at all. If you're a fan of tricky platformers, particularly ones that require a bit of brainpower, then be sure to check out *Little Samson*.



» [NES] The four swappable characters each have distinct abilities that prove useful in the game.

» MSX

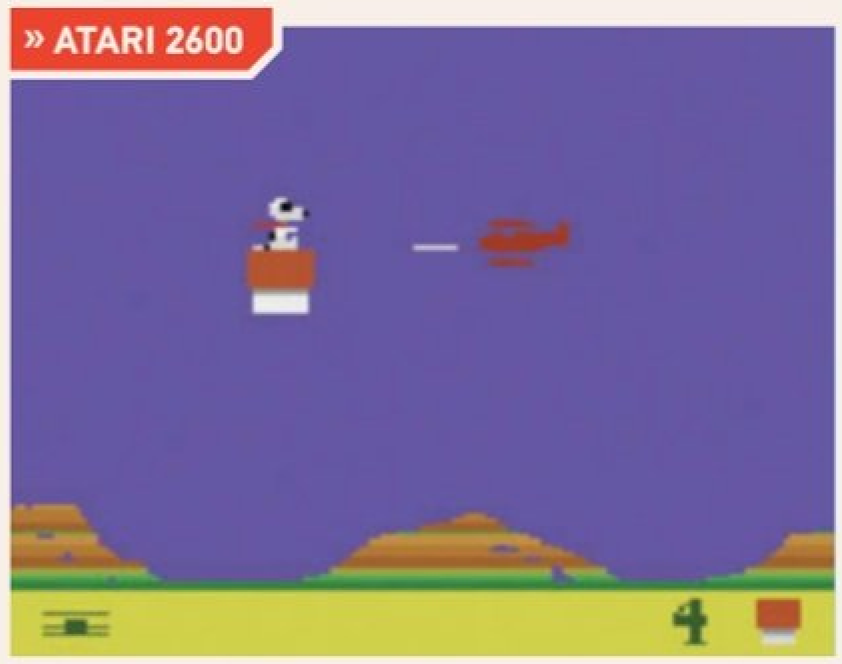


» MR DO'S WILD RIDE

■ SYSTEM: MSX
■ DEVELOPER: UNIVERSAL ■ YEAR: 1985

■ **The third game** in Universal's *Mr Do!* series was released in arcades in 1984, and the MSX was the only machine to receive a home port. Thankfully, it's a decent and playable conversion. Sharing much with *Donkey Kong*, this episode sees the eponymous clown taking a break from digging up cherries to navigate a series of perilous rollercoaster tracks. Danger comes from runaway carriages, moving parts and automated lifts, and to survive requires you to carefully time your ascent using ladders. The staple cherries can also be collected along the way to boost your score. A fun and addictive platformer.

» ATARI 2600



» SNOOPY AND THE RED BARON

■ SYSTEM: ATARI 2600
■ DEVELOPER: ATARI ■ YEAR: 1983

■ **This *Defender*-style** shooter very much has younger gamers in its crosshairs. You must help Snoopy to dogfight the infamous German flying ace… well, actually, quite a few of him. During the air battles, the enemies will perform random food drops and, if Snoopy gobbles them up before they reach terra firma, he stands to earn some bonus points. With bright, colourful, cartoon graphics, smooth scrolling, fun gameplay, and neat little touches such as Snoopy's doghouse showing bullet holes, it's a polished and enjoyable VCS shooter.

» PC ENGINE



» DIE HARD

■ SYSTEM: PC ENGINE
■ DEVELOPER: PACK-IN-VIDEO ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **The TurboGrafx is** a treasure trove of obscure licensed videogames. *Die Hard* is essentially a *Commando* clone, with the player assuming the role of John McClane. Weirdly, you get to blast your way through a forest and swamp before reaching Nakatomi Plaza, and in *Dead Space* fashion, your energy is represented by the colour of John's vest: the whiter and cleaner the better, until he's down to just his bullet-riddled skin. It's a fun shooter but it is a bit on the easy side, so if you're a fan of vertical run-and-gun shooters and the *Die Hard* movies but are a bit rubbish at games, this was made for you.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Alternative Software

It is one of a select group of Eighties software houses that still exist today, and has graduated from the ZX Spectrum to the PlayStation 3 in the process. From Henry's Hoard to Jonah Lomu Rugby Challenge, Graeme Mason tells the story of industry veteran Alternative Software…

It's 1977, and in a classroom at Manchester's Metropolitan University sits a young man with many things on his mind in addition to his lecture on Biological Sciences. The man's name is Roger Hulley and he will go on to create one of the most enduring software houses of the last 30 years. But for now, he is more concerned about a different type of entertainment…

"I loved – and still love – music," begins Roger, "and spent many evenings at University either DJing or writing for numerous rock fanzines." It didn't take long for Roger to realise that a career in biological science would be infinitely less exciting than one in the music industry, so in a moment that immeasurably changed his path, he obtained a place at Thorn EMI as one of their graduate trainees. "I was so passionate about music, and still thinking like a student back then," Roger laughs, "and as EMI then owned HMV, all I could think about was working in a record shop." And this being the late Seventies, HMV was still making big money just by selling records alone; Roger's dream job of working at such a shop meant he had a huge record collection at his disposal. "I could basically take home any record and listen to it all night. To me that was more motivation than any amount of money!"

Movin' On Up

Roger was soon poached from HMV by a chain of record shops called Fox's, becoming its general manager in the north of England. "At that time, record shops only sold records and music-related merchandise," he recalls, "and eventually I thought we should be expanding into other areas as well." Roger had noted the advent of the video cassette, a phenomenon that was taking over the UK. In due course Fox's became the first record shop in Yorkshire to begin stocking a video library. With the arrival of CD technology shortly afterwards, he also negotiated that new music medium into his record stores as well, when supply for the format was exceedingly thin. "So then I thought to myself, what comes next?" ponders Roger, and there are no prizes for guessing what he did.

"At around this time, Atari were making waves with the Atari VCS so I thought, we could sell those as well, and before long we had Atari cartridges in the shops," Roger tells us. Fox's general manager could clearly see the parallels between computer games and his beloved music industry. "I just got the feeling this could be quite fun," he explains excitedly, "and could accurately reproduce the buzz in the record industry when you had a hit." So, with a host of connections in place, thanks to his enterprising expansion within Fox's Record Shops, Roger packed in the day job in 1984 and headed for the golden land: computer game publishing, though not without a short detour…

"I started off by distributing games via a new company called R&R," he explains, before we enquire as to the meaning of

INSTANT EXPERT

Alternative was formed in 1985 and its first two games were *Henry's Hoard* and *Pheenix*, both on the ZX Spectrum

It remained heavily focused on the Spectrum, due to the licensing of primarily British characters such as Postman Pat and Fireman Sam

However, it also published many games on a wide variety of formats such as the Electron and MSX

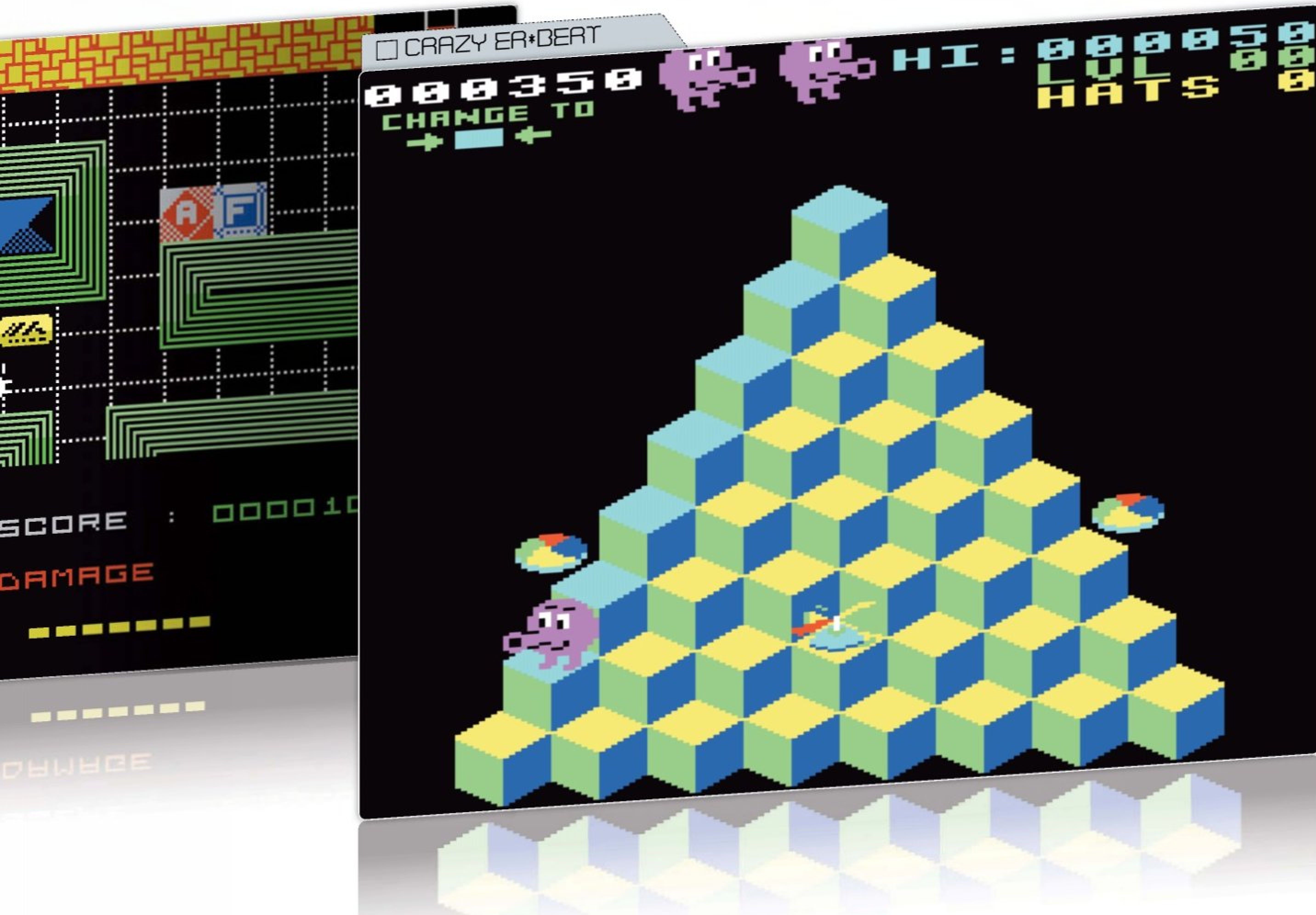
Alternative often acquired whole back catalogues of companies that were exiting the software industry such as Piranha, Mikro-Gen and Microsphere

The release of shooter *Operation Hormuz* was renamed *Harrier 7* by publisher Accolade, who purchased the rights from Alternative to distribute the game in the US

1995's *Super League* Pro Rugby was one of the first games to feature a dual commentary courtesy of Sky Sports' Eddie Hemmings and Mike Stephenson

***Dalek Attack* was** planned for a 1993 release in line with the 30th anniversary of *Doctor Who*. *Dalek Attack* and *Bully's Sporting Darts* were among the final licensed games released on the ZX Spectrum

In 1992, Roger Hulley attended the yearly *Doctor Who* PanoptiCon in Coventry to demonstrate and promote *Dalek Attack*. His favourite Doctor is Tom Baker



CRAZY ER*BERT

“Doing budget games at £1.99 was fine, but margins were very tight”

ROGER HULLEY ON THE BUDGET SOFTWARE MARKET

A MUNSTER HIT

As Alternative sought a more diverse range of children's TV properties, Roger Hulley's thoughts turned to cult classic American show, *The Addams Family.*

"It was 1988 or 1989 I think, and I'd managed to get through to someone at ABC regarding the show," recalls Roger, "and they were all about to go on some outing. Talking to this guy in LA, I realised I could hear all his colleagues in the background singing the theme music!"

Roger then tried to approach the rights holder, Charles Adams' ex-wife Lady Barbara Colyton, who proved too troublesome to track down.

"So eventually I gave up and signed its rival, *The Munsters*, instead." *The Munsters* became the first game on Alternative's full-price label Again Again while *The Addams Family* was turned into a hit movie in 1991. "I'd like to think my phone call jogged their memory about this great show they were sitting on!" claims Roger, tongue firmly in cheek.

this abbreviation. Roger chuckles. "Er, rest and recreation, as the Americans say? I'm not too sure it stood for anything to be honest…" In any case, he had his foot in the door of the games industry and it wasn't long before the next stage presented itself, as Roger describes. "Mick Robinson, who was the business partner of a guy named Martyn Brown, came to me to discuss distributing a game they had written." The game was *Henry's Hoard*, a Spectrum platform game starring the eponymous little gnome. Martyn (who would soon achieve fame by founding Team 17) and Mick had been selling the game under their own label, Alternative Software, and were keen to enhance sales. Sensing his chance, Roger Hulley offered to buy all their remaining stock, the masters and the intellectual property, including the software label name.

The Gnome And The Clone

Alternative began by shifting the existing stock of *Henry's Hoard*, utilising the original packaging, with one difference: the price. Each cassette inlay was now clearly marked £1.99 above a black square under which the previous price of £4.95 lay. "From the distribution side, I was always looking for games that were being developed by one-man bands or home coders," explains Roger, "and as I was keen to expand, I started to buy these outright and re-release them under the new label." Next was Megadodo's classic arcade shooter *Pheenix*, which Alternative acquired towards the end of 1985, before ensuring both it and *Henry's Hoard* were in the shops for the all-important Christmas market. This was not, however, the end for rapacious Henry or the arcade clone.

"We thought that perhaps part of the reason *Henry's Hoard* hadn't been such a great seller for Martyn and Mick was the packaging," remembers Roger, "so we approached the Design Council [a government-funded body with an aim to promote and improve the design of British products] as we'd heard there were grants available for helping to design products. Eventually we got a small grant to put a design together for all of our game packaging." Alternative's two existing games along with a pair of new titles (cricket game *Howzat!* and Electron shooter, *Night Strike*) boasted fresh covers and an updated Alternative Software logo, now abbreviated to "AS" and bound within a blue box in the upper left hand corner of the cassette inlay.

With ex-Alligata man Dave Palmer handling the print and production side of the business, Roger concentrated on the development and sourcing of new product. "The wave of games at Christmas 1986 were very successful," he remarks with pride, "and gave us a real fillip to expand our range." *Howzat!* in particular was a

BY THE NUMBERS

9 Alternative adventure games published from the keyboard of the Dreaming Djinn, aka Charles A. Sharp

221: b, the developer behind *Dalek Attack*

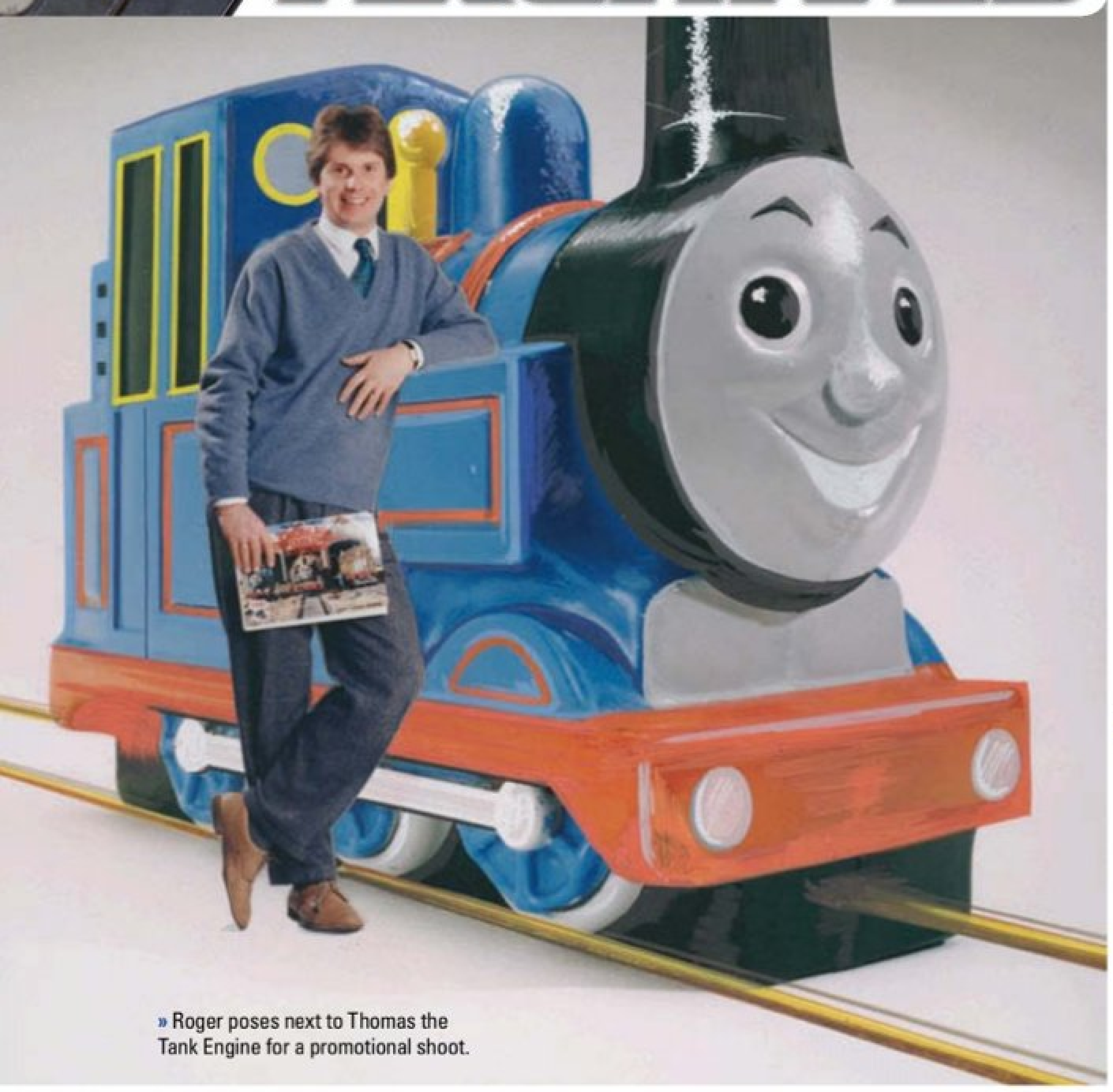
11: Percentage of market share in 1988 according to an Alternative claim in *The Games Machine*

27: Years for Alternative… and counting!

200: Just less than the amount of magical items Henry needed in *Henry's Hoard*

2000: Approximate amount in that Alternative received from UK Design Council

FROM THE ARCHIVES



» Roger poses next to Thomas the Tank Engine for a promotional shoot.

TIMELINE

1984 – ROGER HULLEY LEAVES HIS JOB AT FOX'S TO BEGIN WORKING IN THE SOFTWARE INDUSTRY, INITIALLY IN DISTRIBUTION. ALTERNATIVE IS FORMED A YEAR LATER WHEN HE ACQUIRES *HENRY'S HOARD* AND *PHEENIX*

1986 – ALONG WITH A FURTHER TWO GAMES, *HOWZAT!* AND *NIGHT STRIKE*, ALTERNATIVE REPACKAGE AND RELEASE *HENRY'S HOARD* AND *PHEENIX* FOR THE CHRISTMAS MARKET

1987 – SUB-LABEL SUMMIT IS FORMED AND THE INITIAL WAVE OF RE-RELEASES AND ORIGINAL GAMES APPEARS ON IT AS WELL AS THE NEW "AS" LABEL

1988 – DAVE PALMER LEAVES ALTERNATIVE TO FORM HI-TEC SOFTWARE. ALTERNATIVE PUBLISH THEIR FIRST 16-BIT GAME

1989 – ALTERNATIVE ENTERS THE FULL PRICE MARKET WITH ANOTHER SUB-LABEL, AGAIN AGAIN AND ITS FIRST RELEASE IS *THE MUNSTERS*. THEIR FIRST ORIGINAL CARTOON LICENCE, POSTMAN PAT, ALSO DEBUTS

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Roger Hulley
Roger remains in charge at Alternative, which is now in its fourth decade in the software industry. Today, it concentrates mainly on its creative software studios and, in conjunction with Tru Blu, its latest release is *Jonah Lomu Rugby Challenge* on the PlayStation 3, XBOX 360 and PS Vita, in addition to the on-going *Super Rugby League* series. The company itself relocated to Castleford in 2003 and is currently developing many of its existing IP for mobile gaming platforms. Many of its older games such as *The Quivering* and *Super League Pro Rugby* are available to buy at www.alternativesoftware.com

Dave Palmer
Dave left Alternative in 1988 to form his own software company – Hi-Tec Software. He still manages his own Games Production and consultancy business (David A Palmer Productions).

Matthew Hill
Responsible for promoting the *Premier Sports* range, Matthew worked at Alternative for just over two and a half years as a sales manager. Today he is head of Recruitment at Specialmove, a dedicated recruitment consultancy for the videogame industry.

Derek Hargreaves
One of Alternative's longest-serving employees, Derek began work there in 1989 as a programmer, although he also found himself regularly involved with other departments as well. He sadly recently succumbed to cancer at the age of 62.

Martyn Brown
Martyn co-founded legendary developer Team 17 in 1990, working on many famous games such as *Alien Breed*, *Superfrog* and *Worms*. He parted ways with the company last year and currently is working at Activision on a new *Pitfall!* game.



» Roger Hulley in his office in 1987.

good seller despite some terrible reviews, with *Crash Magazine* awarding the game one of its lowest scores.

Alternative began expanding rapidly in 1987, re-releasing a range of older games such as the Sparklers' *Danger Mouse* series, the Mikro-Gen classic *Everyone's A Wally* and a number of original games. The year also saw the introduction of another label which got its name from a strange source. "Back in the Thirties, my father, Frederick, had invented a card game called *Sum-it*," says Roger, "and it sold very well. But he was selling the game in addition to his day job and one day he came home and outside his terraced house in Bradford was a posh car so big it stretched across several doors!" The car belonged to a representative of the famous game company Waddington's and they bought *Sum-it* on the spot from Frederick Hulley for the princely sum of £1000. "That was quite a lot of money back then," notes Roger, "and my father always suspected that the reason they bought it was because it was affecting the sales of one of their own card games in the area."

Over forty years later, when Alternative needed an inspiration for the name for their new label, *Sum-it* fit the bill perfectly, albeit with a slight alteration. But what would be the role of the new range? "Doing budget games at £1.99 was fine, but margins were very tight, especially when you were buying old titles," grimaces Roger, "so we decided we'd need another line as well."

Peak Progress

Summit's original remit was full-price software, but the mixed success of its first product, Spectrum graphics package *Art Master* quickly persuaded Roger that big boxes and price tags of £9.95 were not a direction Alternative wanted to take at that point. The utility, which was an interesting precursor to future Alternative products, was soon dropped in price to £2.99 and this became the entry level for all Summit games. As well as re-released games Summit also published original games, although these were low-key releases despite *Cannibals From Outer Space* boasting not only a great title but also a renowned programmer in Charles Bystram of *Brian Bloodaxe* fame. "I already had a rough plan for the two labels," says Roger, "and it was to separate our games into those designed for younger and older game players." This was echoed in Summit's release schedule of 1987 and early 1988 as Games Workshop titles such as *Battlecars* mixed with the likes of PSS' *Pegasus Bridge* (a WW2 strategy game) and Electric Dreams' *Hijack*.

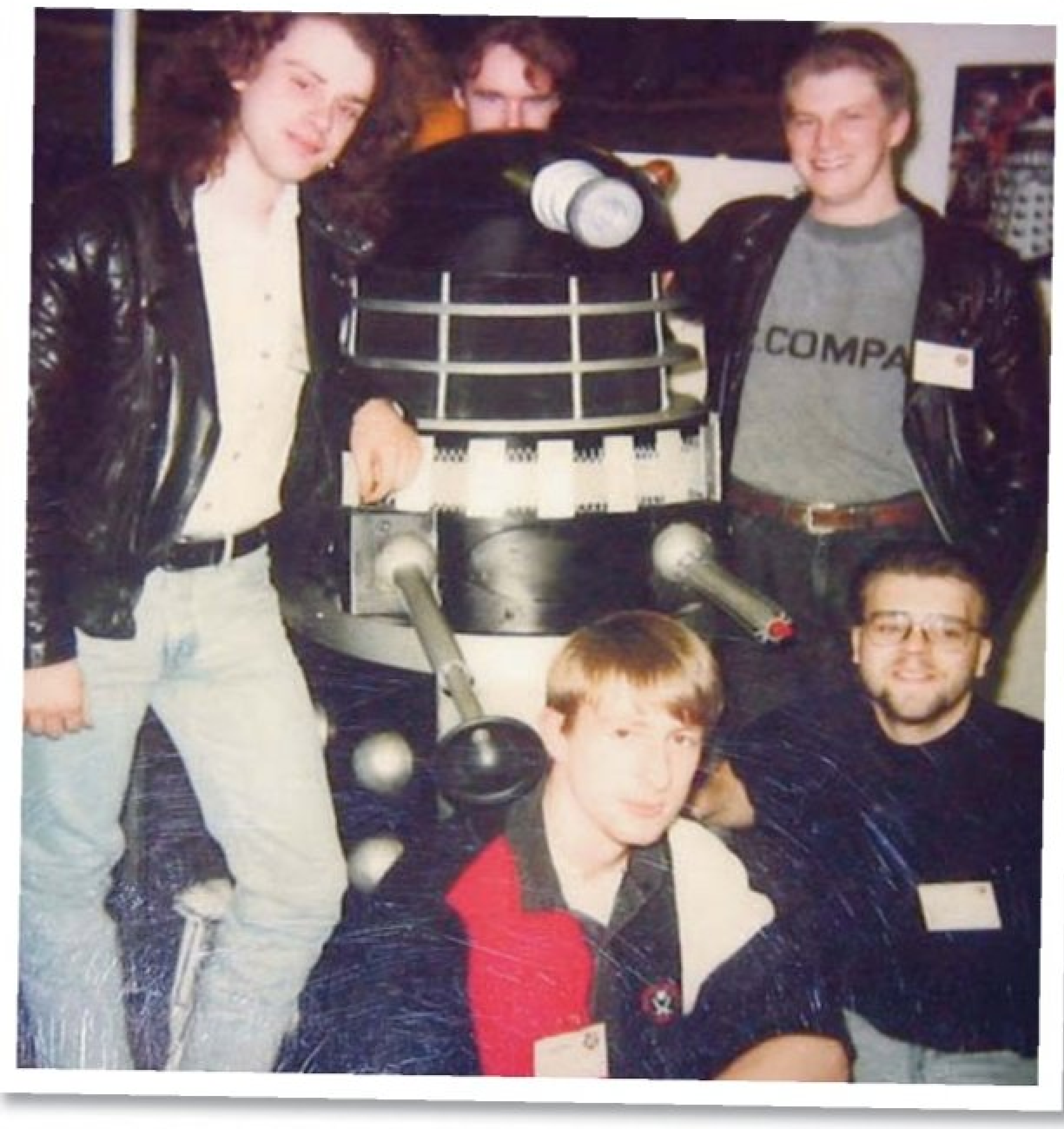
With the original label also selling well, Roger plunged some of Alternative's profits into what he considered a vital area. "Doing budget games was great fun – but tough," he declares, "and as we were selling each cassette for less than a pound each, we effectively made only a few pence on each one. The physical cost was quite high compared to what we were selling the games for." With distribution covered, they decided it was time to enter another part of the supply chain as Roger divulges.

"We were using a duplication plant based in Dewsbury, and I got the impression that they weren't really focused on games. So eventually I bought their duplication equipment in order to have more control of the entire process." Alternative was determined that no-one could stop their games getting from development to the shop shelves without costs being shaved as much as possible. "We were fortunate in getting that piece of kit when we did," muses Roger, "and we were micro-managing the whole production, even down to the price of the pancakes of tape."

By 1988, Alternative was also employing its own programmers who adopted the name Bizarre Developments. Initially consisting of Richard Stevenson, Paul Bellamy and Michael Lister they, along with Enigma Variations and Keith Goodyer, were responsible for coding many of the original Alternative games during this period. Also



- **1990** THE FIRST OF ALTERNATIVE'S "4 MOST" COMPILATIONS APPEARS, EACH CONTAINING FOUR PREVIOUS RELEASES INTO A THEMED COLLECTION
- **1993** WHSMITHS CEASES STOCKING 8-BIT GAMES. ALTERNATIVE MUST FIND OTHER AREAS OF REVENUE
- **1995** ALTERNATIVE HELPS START NOTTINGHAM-BASED DEVELOPER CHARYBDIS, WHO PRODUCE THREE GAMES FOR THEM
- **1997** IN SEPTEMBER, A FIRE BREAKS OUT. IT DESTROYS MOST OF THEIR STOCK AND OFFICE EQUIPMENT
- **1998** THE INTERACTIVE PREMIER LEAGUE SOFTWARE SHOOTS ALTERNATIVE FORWARD, WITH MANY TEAMS USED
- **2003** ALTERNATIVE MOVES BACK INTO GAMES WITH *SUPER RUGBY LEAGUE*, THANKS TO AN ALLIANCE WITH TRU BLU ENTERTAINMENT. IT ALSO FINALLY MOVED OFFICES
- **2011** ALTERNATIVE'S MOST RECENT GAME, *JONAH LOMU RUGBY CHALLENGE*, IS RELEASED ON PS3, XBOX 360 AND PS VITA



in 1988, Alternative published its first game on the 16-bit computers (the *Ghosts 'n' Goblins* clone, *Night Walk*) and realised the inevitable direction that 8-bit software was taking.

You'll Never Win Anything With Kids

It wasn't uncommon at the time for magazine reviewers to look down on games aimed at younger players, yet this was the market the ZX Spectrum in particular was inexorably heading towards. "There wasn't much educational or kids software around, even in 1988," explains Roger, "and what there was seemed quite expensive. So we thought we would try and obtain a licence to a children's TV programme and make an arcade game whilst developing educational games from the same property."

Roger's first idea was to try one of the most popular shows of then and still now: *Thomas The Tank Engine*. "I contacted Britt Allcroft whose company controlled Thomas at that time and they turned down my proposal," Roger reveals, "and I think it was because they thought all computer games were violent and were about shooting things. I tried to explain to them that we wanted to create a game where the child could live in the world of the character and not even necessarily play the game; that they could just go and visit places from the TV show if they wanted and interact with characters they'd recognise. But for whatever reason they didn't go for it."

Undeterred, Alternative found the BBC to be much more receptive to their idea. "We signed up *Postman Pat* from them and kids loved it," smiles Roger, "and it was extremely successful. We made sure it had the simple concept where you could just drive around visiting locations if you wished, so the game could be enjoyed even on a basic level." With Postman Pat manoeuvring his little red van around the upper echelons of the 8-bit games charts, Roger contacted Britt Allcroft again, this time successfully acquiring the *Thomas* licence on the back of Alternative's work on *Postman Pat*. Subsequently, adaptations of *Count Duckula*, *Fireman Sam* and *Sooty & Sweep* (among others) all found their way onto a breadth of computer platforms, with the only downside to their success the postponement of the educational line. Eventually, Alternative's sub-label, Friendly Learning, released a brace of titles in 1990 based on *Sooty & Sweep* and *Thomas The Tank Engine*.

The End Of The 8-bits

By the early Nineties, Alternative's range of 8-bit software was still going so strong that they saw no reason to slow production, despite an increased output on the Amiga and Atari ST. As a result, they were still on the frontline when the abrupt end came to the 8-bit software market. "The situation came pretty much to a head overnight," recalls Roger sadly, "when WHSmith decided – prematurely, in our opinion – not to stock 8-bit games anymore." With the other retailers that were still stocking 8-bit games at that time soon following suit, Alternative was suddenly exposed at the only part of their supply chain they didn't control, retail, and the decision forced them to concentrate on the Amiga and Atari ST. "To be honest, it was a very difficult time as we didn't have enough games coming through on the 16-bit computers," admits Roger, "and this meant we released a lot less games than before. Also, with larger development teams and higher costs, it was not possible to produce games at pocket-money prices any more. Everyone seemed to be going for bigger boxes as well, which was frustrating as we were

> **"I got the feeling this could be quite fun"**
> ROGER HULLEY ON GETTING INTO THE SOFTWARE MARKET





A SHARP SENSE OF HUMOUR

Alternative published several adventures from the keyboard of Charles A. Sharp, most of which were of a satirical nature.

Star Wreck made fun of old sci-fi shows, specifically *Star Trek*, *SMASHED* did the same for Seventies comedy *MASH* whilst *Wiz-Biz* saw Sharp focus his humour on the familiar adventure game fantasy setting.

With most of his games created using Incentive's *Graphic Adventure Creator* and many under the pseudonym The Dreaming Djinn, Sharp produced further adventures on a variety of sports such as cricket (*Cricket-Crazy*) and athletics (*For Gold or Glory*).

FROM THE ARCHIVES

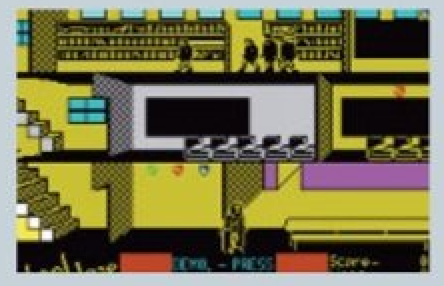


[Amiga] Alternative's first original film licence, *Suburban Commando* starring Hulk Hogan.

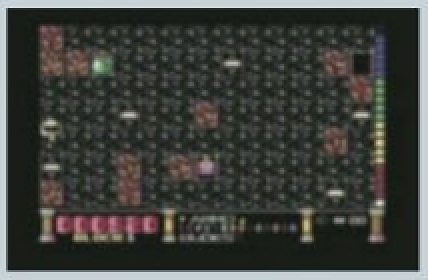
SIX OF THE BEST



Pheenix (Spectrum) [1985]
Originally released by one-hit wonder label, Megadodo, *Pheenix* was one of many arcade clones on the ZX Spectrum in the early Eighties. Alternative repackaged the colourful 16k shooter and gave it a new lease of life in 1985 and again in 1986.



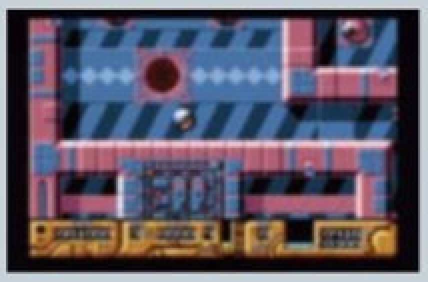
Skool Daze (Spectrum) [1988]
"We usually had to make sure the covers differed from the original, so we updated Skool Daze's grim original cover to the cartoony style that fit in with our range much better," says Roger, on the cover.



Reckless Rufus (Commodore 64) [1992]
Reckless Rufus combined simplicity with some addictive gameplay. With innovative game design, you had to construct a path through each level, carefully avoiding the enemies that threatened the valiant hero.



Bangers & Mash (Spectrum) [1992]
After *The Wombles* and *Huxley Pig*, *Bangers & Mash* was the third FilmFair licence from Alternative. Bizarre Developments did a great job of translating the cheeky chimps onto the Spectrum.



Galactic Warrior Rats (Amiga) [1992]
This top-down multi-scrolling shooter saw the player taking control of a "pod" ship that could be outfitted with modifications as the game progressed. Difficult, but with crisp graphics and satisfyingly busy levels.



The Quivering (PC) [1998]
A semi-sequel to the previous Alternative/Charybdis game *Spud!*, which had not been well received by press or public alike. This horror-comedy was as amusing as it was scary, and had a coffin-full of classic movie references and characters.

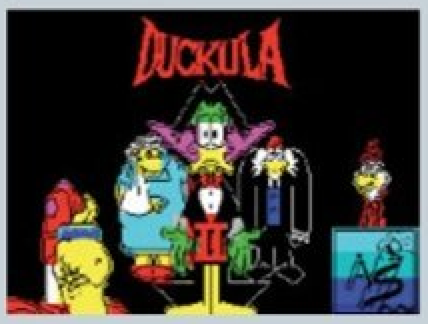
THREE TO AVOID



Ready Steady Go (Spectrum/C64) [1988]
Despite a pseudo-3D effect, *Ready Steady Go* was a keyboard-masher left hopelessly trailing by *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*, released some four years earlier. The Spectrum version scored a wretched 13% in *Crash Magazine*.



Night Walk (Amiga) [1988]
Alternative's first 16-bit game was a relatively inauspicious start, considering what there was to come. The poorly defined sprites were bad enough, but mix in some sluggish controls and strange gameplay mechanics and you had a frustrating mess of a game.



Count Duckula 2 (Spectrum) [1992]
Even allowing for its target audience, this sequel based on the Cosgrove Hall cartoon hamstrung its playability with slow, unresponsive controls and some dreadful collision detection. Absolutely one to avoid, whatever your age.

now competing desperately for shelf space." With game consoles now proving popular, it was clear that Alternative needed to find another format in addition to the 16-bit computers.

"We didn't publish one single game on the Sega Mega Drive, Super Nintendo or the next generation of consoles such as the PlayStation," Roger explains, "because for those platforms it was obvious to me you had to spend a lot of money on development, which was fine if the game was a hit. But for a small operation such as ours, if it wasn't a hit, it could be the end. I had a young family at the time and just didn't want to take that big gamble on one particular title." So Alternative remained in the home computer sector, kept its overheads low and gravitated to the PC, porting a number of their 8-bit titles in 1992 and 1993. They invested in the creation of Nottingham-based development studio Charybdis, with an initial deal to release three games under their label. Despite some novel ideas, however, point-and-click games *Spud!* and *The Quivering* were not great successes, although the Rugby League simulator *Super League Pro Rugby* was a good seller according to Roger.

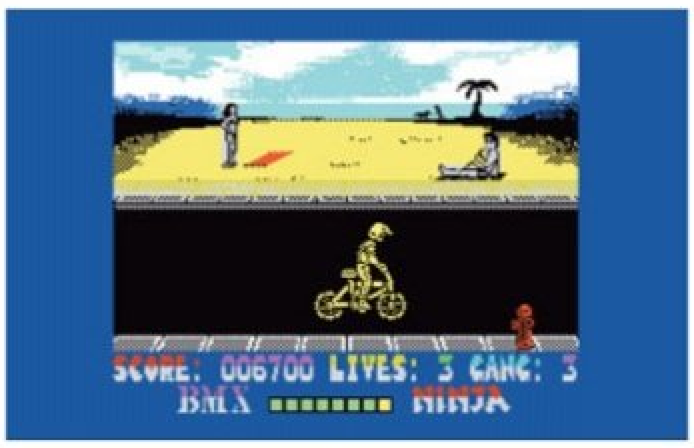
The Great Fire Of Pontefract

With the mid-Nineties already proving troublesome, the fates were about to deal Alternative another cruel blow. "I had a phone call one night and I'll never forget the date: 21 September 1997," says Roger, softly. "It was our alarm company telling me the office alarm was going off and I needed to get down there sharpish." Alternative was based at the Baileygate Industrial estate in Pontefract, and as Roger drove that fateful night to his office, he noticed a huge plume of smoke rising forebodingly into the cool autumn sky. "I remember thinking, 'God, I hope that isn't my place!'" says Roger, and indeed it wasn't. It was the place next door…

"It was a storage unit for the Prince of Wales Hospice. They used it to keep all their donations before dispersing them to their various shops in the area, and someone had broken in, evidently looking for cash or valuable items." says Roger. When there were presumably little valuables to be pinched, the thieves had set fire to the unit and in a very short time the resultant blaze had overtaken Alternative's offices as well. "It was a disaster," continues Roger grimly, "as all our stock was kept there, as was the duplication equipment which had been updated to reproduce floppy discs and CD-ROMs instead of cassettes." Worse still, in addition to the office equipment and stock destroyed in the fire, one whole section of wall between the two units had collapsed. "One of my oldest members of staff was programmer Derek Hargreaves who joined in 1989," remembers Roger, "and he was there that night, just sobbing, as our livelihood went up in flames." Everyone assumed it was the end of Alternative.

Alternative Revenues

But as Jeff Goldblum explained in *Jurassic Park*, life finds a way. "We needed something to sell, and sell quickly," says







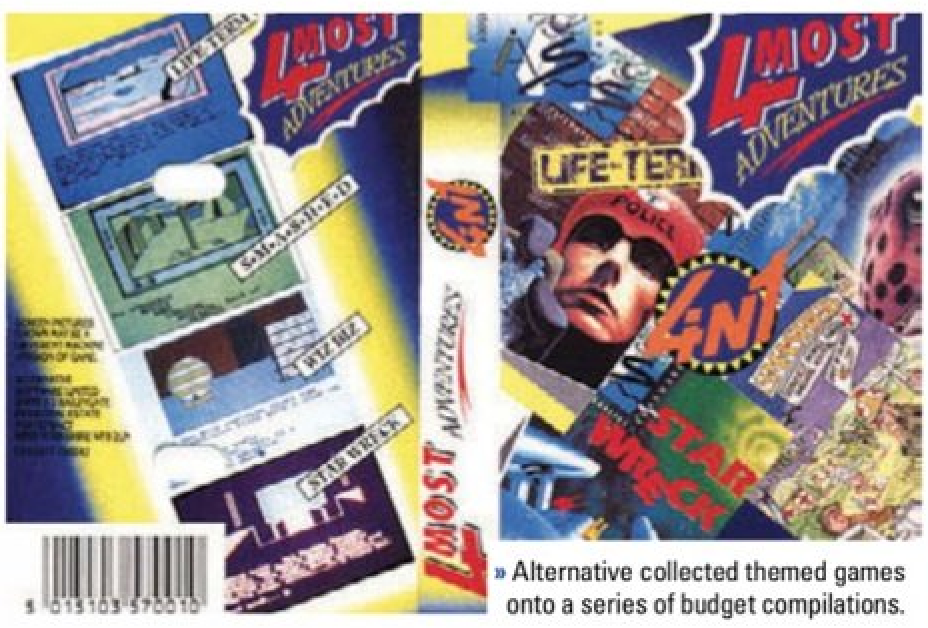
"We needed something to sell, and sell quickly"
ROGER ON THE AFTERMATH OF THE FIRE



Roger Hulley (left) and company accountant Kevin Picken celebrate Alternative's 20th anniversary.


» [Amiga] Alternative updated many of their 8-bit games on to the Amiga and Atari ST.





» Alternative collected themed games onto a series of budget compilations.

» [Spectrum] One of Alternative's final releases on the Spectrum: *Bully's Sporting Darts*.


Roger before he explains how the Premier Sports range came into existence. "In the aftermath of the fire, I was busy sorting out loads of paperwork and dealing with insurance companies," he says, "and the programmers kept asking me what to do. So I told them to go and do some simple screensavers, ostensibly to keep them occupied." When Roger's team returned with some impressive visual and interactive programs, he spotted a commercial possibility. That possibility became the Premier Sports label, a range of interactive CD-ROMs, each tied into a specific Premier League Football club.

Along with a collection of ancillary products, these sold very well (thanks in no small part to the promotional work of new recruit Matthew Hill) and ensured Alternative would survive. "It was another taxing time," says Roger, "as after the fire we were essentially working for six months with nothing but a tarpaulin between us and the elements. We tried to move but there just wasn't a suitable location available at such short notice."

Within a couple of years the Premier Sports range began to fade but fortunately Alternative had already successfully re-established another line of software. "Many years ago I had sat there thinking about all these licences we had such as *Sooty & Sweep*," says Roger, "and wondered whether there was something else we could utilise them for other than games." Alternative had already gone educational with the brace of Friendly Learning games from 1990; Roger recalled *Art Master* and pondered the possibility of combining the two genres.

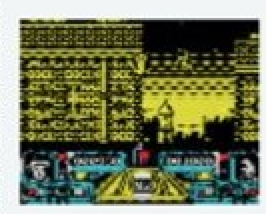
"We had the idea of an electronic colouring book," says Roger, "which had been done before, but not necessarily with major licences involved. I thought it could be a good seller and we produced a number of them in the early-to-mid-Nineties." The best of these was *Playdays Paint*, which was released on the Amiga in 1996 and a few years later Alternative began utilising a variety of new IP to show off their interactive creations, beginning with *The Lord Of The Rings* movies and then films such as *Madagascar* and *Shrek*. "We became very good at this sort of product, I think because we'd come from a fun gaming environment," says Roger proudly, "and they have proved extremely popular, especially when tied into printer promotional campaigns." The latest of these was Alternative's *Harry Potter Activity Print Studio*, which was released last year, allied to Canon's latest printer hardware.

A return to games

We ask the Alternative boss what happened to the games? "It was a little bit sad to move away from games at that point, but in reality it was a necessity. During the late Nineties we got an investor on board and this, coupled with the creative studios, allowed us to not only survive, but slowly expand." Games eventually came again with Roger's favourite sport, Rugby League (he was vice chairman of Castleford Tigers for ten years) and an association with Tru Blu Entertainment of Australia. *Rugby League* debuted on the Xbox and PlayStation 2 late in 2003 and has so far spawned several sequels as well as a PSP version and *World Cup* edition.

As you might expect from a company that has operated for so long in a volatile industry, Alternative Software has lived through many exciting yet difficult times. We conclude by asking Roger the secret to its success. "I'd like to profess to some powerful understanding of the games industry," he smiles modestly, "but actually the truth is a little more boring. We've kept our overheads very tight, never over-expanded and never had an over-inflated opinion of ourselves." An ability to adapt to circumstances is also a key factor in the Alternative success story – one that looks set to continue for some time to come.

ATTACK OF THE DALEKS



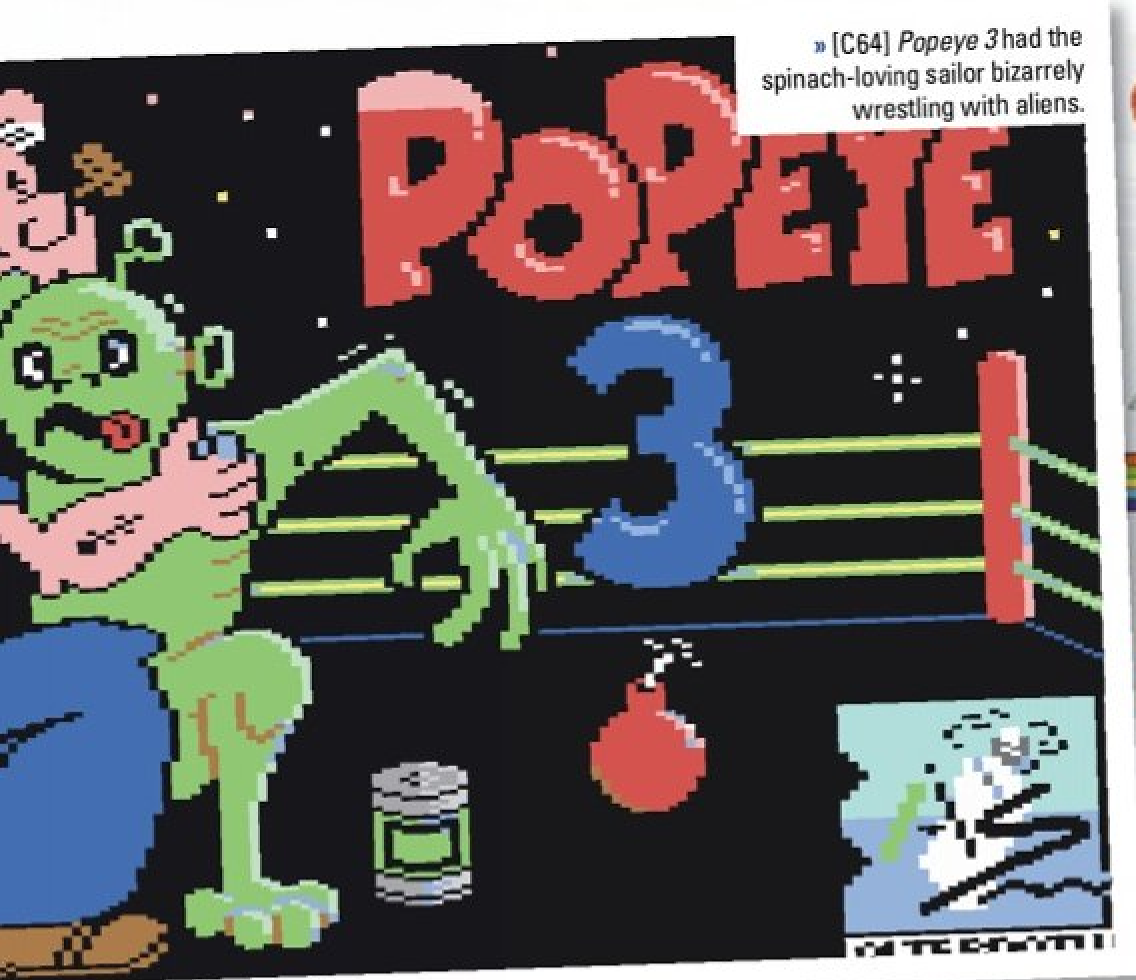
Late in 1992, Alternative released *Dalek Attack*, one of the last licensed games to appear on the ZX Spectrum, it was coded by 221b Software Development. "We were based in Sheffield," says ex-221b founder Dave Vout, "and were pitching for work. I guess Alternative was just local to us."

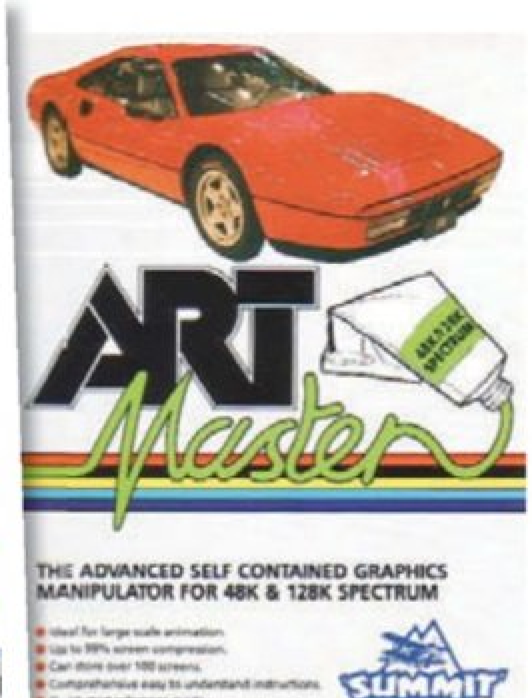
Dave and his team soon found working on a licence in the early Nineties to be an enjoyable yet tricky affair. "There were no visits to the set or advance concept art in those days, so we had very little material to work on other than a book I bought at a car boot sale and some BBC videos!"

The 221b team were given carte blanche to create their own story which then had to be approved by the BBC and Alternative. "The hot topic at the time was the hole in the ozone layer," explains Dave, "so I had an idea that the Daleks were unable to fight humans directly so they used rays that destroyed the ozone layer to accelerate mankind's demise."

The finished versions, while perfectly fine games, disappointed Dave a little. "The licence had so much potential, but as was then and still is now, we were working to a very tight budget and schedule which meant you could never quite create the game you wanted to."

Roger Hulley enjoyed the development of *Dalek Attack* too. "We did a lot of research and put loads of stuff into the game, even down to the names of the streets," he says. "My son got into classic *Doctor Who* at the time as well. He was watching these old videos with William Hartnell and Tom Baker while his mates were into *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*!"

» [C64] *Popeye 3* had the spinach-loving sailor bizarrely wrestling with aliens.




THE MAKING OF



Denmark. . . the country that brought us The Little Mermaid, brooding TV crime dramas, Carlsberg, and classic Amiga shooters Hybris and Battle Squadron. Mike Bevan talks to Martin Pedersen and Torben Larsen, the duo behind these Scandinavian shootfests



How did you become involved in Amiga games programming and computer graphics?

Torben Larsen: As a youngster, I was heavily into code-typing games from computer magazines on the ZX81 and later the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64. The whole access to coding and pixels was quite thrilling as I recall it. Every month the new *C&VG* magazine was a must-buy, together with other UK magazines. From then on my interest rose in both coding and doing the 'pixels' and getting under the hood of these new computers. I eventually left the coding side and dug further into 'pixel pushing' on the C64, and later the Amiga.

Martin Pedersen: Mine's a similar story, but just on the coding side. I never had any flair whatsoever for the graphics! I got my first computer in 1982, a ZX81, which was actually an upgraded ZX80 that I bought used from money saved from my paper round. From then on it was Spectrum, Amstrad, and Amiga. Before the ZX81 there was actually an interest in electronics, so I think it came from there.

How did you come to meet each other? And what made you decide as a team to focus on shoot-'em-up games like *Hybris* and then *Battle Squadron*?

TL: I met Martin while doing art for *The Vikings* on the C64; he was coding the Amstrad version. Being impressed with what we saw on the Amiga convinced us that it was the next logical step. The Amiga was so much like an arcade machine with its technical specs that we couldn't resist. All of a sudden we could do arcade-style games, because even though there were limitations, the Amiga was made in a way that would allow heavy tweaking on the hardware in terms of numbers of sprites and colours, etc.

***Hybris* and *Battle Squadron* seem very inspired by *Terra Cresta* and *Terra Force* respectively – were you big fans of those games? Were you inspired by any other arcade or Amiga shoot-'em-ups?**

MP: We took on inspiration from all sorts of games including *Terra Cresta* and other arcade games. We spent quite a few bucks on *Terra Cresta* and *Dangar* down at the local mall… With the Amiga we would not settle for less than pure arcade quality and we pushed the Amiga quite a bit in the 'blitter' department to reach that goal.

IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** INNERPRISE/ ELECTRONIC ARTS
- » **DEVELOPER:** COPE-COM
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **PLATFORM:** (ORIGINAL) AMIGA, SEGA MEGA DRIVE
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP



» [Amiga] With so much going on, *Battle Squadron*'s frantic two-player mode really pushed the Amiga hardware.



» [Amiga] These bizarre-looking alien critters stand guard on the mountain-tops later in the game.



» [Amiga] Massive fortresses spew a barrage of bullets.



» [Amiga] Torben's vivid graphic style was evocative of classic Eighties arcade shooters.

Both games made improvements over the original *Terra Cresta* and *Terra Force*. How important was it to make these improvements?

TL: Not just changes but new ideas like the special invisible 'Predator' cloaking (obviously inspired by the movie) enemy effect, more colours and better game flow. Few people realise that the total amount of colours on screen in *Amiga Battle Squadron* is over one hundred, and that's in regular 32-colour Amiga mode. Perhaps that's one reason why the game even today looks so colour 'fresh'.

***Hybris* was a one-player game, but *Battle Squadron* allowed two players to fight together at the same time – did this add any complications to the programming process?**

MP: It definitely put the Amiga hardware blitter under intense pressure. Almost everything had to be doubled, but in our quest for pure arcade quality we squeezed it to handle the task. Actually, under certain circumstances while playing *Battle Squadron*, especially playing two-player on the Amiga, you can actually see how heavy the blitter burden really is. But we'll leave that up to gamers to find out for themselves!

There's a significant increase in graphic quality between the already good-looking *Hybris* and the detailed, beautifully coloured backgrounds and enemies of *Battle Squadron*. How did you manage such an impressive artistic leap between the two games?

TL: We had a much tighter control over the colour palette and much better blitter handling in *Battle Squadron* than *Hybris*. We didn't want a flat colourless shooter, but a great shooter with unique, never-before-seen effects on the Amiga. There had to be fun things in the game like the trains moving and hiding in the tubes, and the invisible enemy 'Predator' effect.

> We would not settle for less than pure arcade quality, and we pushed the Amiga quite a bit in the 'blitter' department

How did you come up with the neat idea of setting off 'smart-bombs' in *Hybris* and *Battle Squadron* by swirling the joystick?

TL: The most popular joysticks back then, the Kempston and Arcade, only had one button so we needed to come up with an idea to release the bomb without hitting the keyboard. *Summer Games* and similar sports games on the C64 actually gave me the idea to twirl the joystick in order to release the Nova missiles.

How involved were you with the Mega Drive (Genesis) port of *Battle Squadron*?

MP: Yes, we did the Sega Mega Drive version of *Battle Squadron* too, some time after the Amiga version was done. Due to the Mega Drive being a lot different in hardware setup, we needed to change quite a lot from the original Amiga version in order to make it fit.

***Battle Squadron* has one of the most iconic classic Amiga soundtracks – can you tell us anything about how it was actually created?**

TL: Ron Klaren did the music and sound FX with a custom-built music player and we had to coordinate it a bit due to lack of memory… and with some frustration… but it turned out to be one of the best classic music pieces on the Amiga.

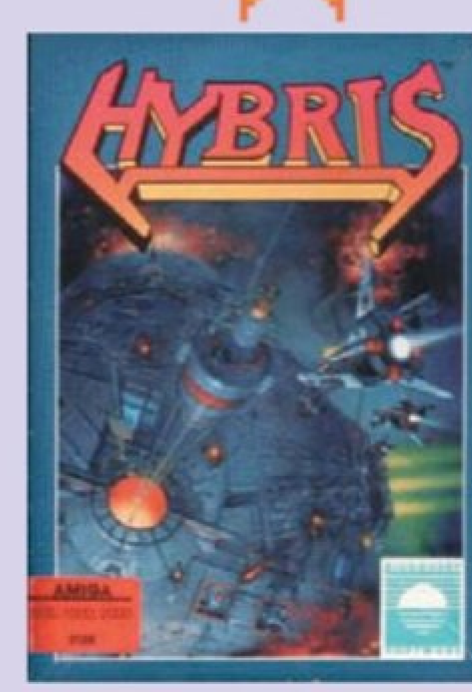
Would it be possible for you to tell us anything about *Atlantis: Battle Squadron 2*, the iOS sequel you are working on?

TL: Basically it's going to be a modern update of *Aviators*, a game that was never finished on the Amiga. We're aiming to make it available for most devices including Windows PC, Apple iOS, Android, and maybe even the Amiga (OS4) if it supports OpenGL.

The original *Battle Squadron* got absolutely fantastic reviews in the Amiga press – such as the 109% from *Amiga Computing* (because it was a whole 9% better than the perfect score they had already given to *Xenon 2*) – and was very well received. How pleased were you with that?

TL: It had to be one of the only Amiga games ever to receive such a rating! From our standpoint it was a great recognition of our hard work and also of the Amiga software tweaking which made it all possible. One could say that we really broke the barrier technically on the Amiga with *Battle Squadron*, and what a great tribute.







» [Amiga] Martin coded the excellent *Terra Cresta*-inspired *Hybris* was when he was just 16 years old.

BATTLE SQUADRON ONE

"IT WAS SOME time in early 2010 we started talking about reviving *Battle Squadron* on iOS," says Torben. "There was quite a bit of initial work getting the old Amiga 2000 out from the basement and getting all the files transferred onto PC/Mac to actually start doing the game… fortunately, the floppies from back then were saved. Otherwise, it would have been all lost! *Battle Squadron* on iOS/Android has been extremely popular, with essentially everybody rating it five stars. And a lot of people are writing extremely nice things, like 'Thanks for reviving the good old times…' You should go and check out the comments. It is quite nice to read…"

For more information on the iOS/Android versions see www.cope-com.com.

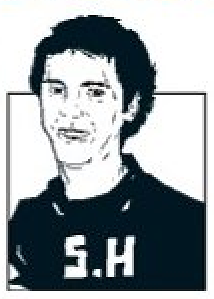




Starstrike II

STAR WARS MEETS BATTLE OF THE PLANETS

» RETROREVIVAL



» CPC 464
» REALTIME GAMES
» 1986

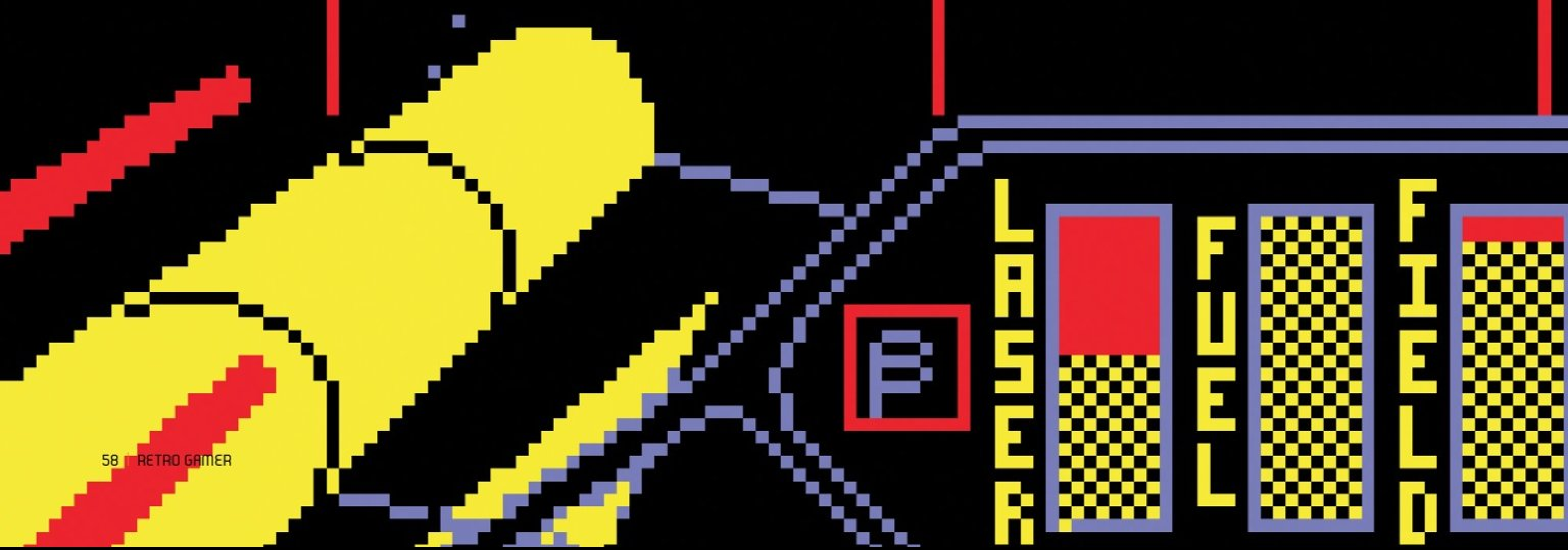
The original 3D *Starstrike* was ace. It might have looked a bit rough around the edges – though it was one of those 3D vector shooters that were rendered in raster graphics, it had that blocky-looking early CPC game look – but beneath its surface was a brazen albeit decent *Star Wars* arcade clone.

The sequel, though, was a big step up over the first game, particularly in terms of its looks. I remember playing it for absolutely hours on my CPC, completely transfixed by its graphics and that stunning-looking cockpit. The wireframe models finally getting some meat on their bones also looked great and gave the visuals a real sense of depth. The gameplay no longer aped that of a popular vector arcade game and was better for it.

Picking up where the last game ended, you're once again fighting the evil alien 'Outsiders'. Piloting the next generation of Starstrike fighters, your mission is to sink any chances the Outsiders have of forming another attack. This is achieved by neutralising their 22 planets, which are split into three distinct categories: Military, Industrial and Agricultural, which basically indicates their difficulty.

You start by first selecting the planet you wish to neutralise, which is achieved by destroying its central control reactor. Reaching them isn't easy, though. No, sirree. This variety-packed mission involved navigating gridded barriers that were heavily guarded by missile systems, engaging in tricky dogfights with the Outsider fleet, and competing in a tarted-up version of the *Star Wars*-inspired trench run level from the original game. Then, of course, you had to actually destroy the reactor, and then you had to do all that a further 21 times to complete the game. Suffice to say I never got anywhere near completing it.

On release, *Starstrike II* scored highly in the magazines of the day and was deserving of the praise that it got. It's a lovely-looking 3D shooter, and if you're looking for something that's a bit *Elite*, a bit *Star Wars*, and quite a bit of a challenge then you should definitely check it out. *




AGRICULTURAL
V

THE EVOLUTION OF STREET FIGHTER

FROM HUMBLE ORIGINS TO A WORLD-CONQUERING FIGHTER

If there's one franchise that has changed the shape of gaming as we know it more than any other, it has to be *Street Fighter*. Having a friend or rival watch over your shoulder as you set a new high score and keenly input your initials (most likely in the form of some kind of shorthand profanity) is great and all, but having them eat humble pie from a plate made of your own skill? Priceless.

Street Fighter may not be solely responsible for the concept of competitive gaming, nor was it the first game to introduce the idea. But by allowing us to select a character we could identify with and make work, the *Street Fighter* series without doubt forged many of the tenets by which we currently (and probably always will) go head-to-head with each another under the watchful eye of a digital referee.

And *Street Fighter* has done so much more for us, too. It's given us the perfect way to vent frustration with the real world by wailing on virtual schmucks at the end of a bad day. It's given us a forum in which to chase our ideals of developing gaming skill, while so many other games just want to take us on a nice "experience" holiday or patronise us until we can't see straight. And it has defined, more than any other series, the rules under which modern gaming competition takes place.

It came from nowhere, another also-ran fighter somehow paving the way for a game and a franchise that would alter the gaming landscape forever, something that would shape us as gamers and change our perceptions of what games could and should be. Call it hyperbole if you want, but we defy anyone to name a more influential or important game than *Street Fighter II* – some on a par, perhaps, but none that could claim to have had a quantifiably greater and longer-lasting effect on gaming as we know it.

But it's an odd tale all the same, one where an innocuous fighter is somehow the basis for a sequel that takes the world by storm and spawns a million imitators. Later follow-ups proved *SFII*'s quality to be no fluke; Capcom's success story seemingly wrote itself as the franchise evolved. And while *Street Fighter II* might be the one game that stands out as defining the franchise, each chapter has its own story to tell and its own relevance in the grand scheme of things.

The original's sketchy special move commands; the sequel's unexpected brilliance; *III*'s unwavering determination and peerless quality despite a dying market; *IV*'s ballsy rejuvenation of a genre long thought dead. Hell, all this rags-to-riches story is missing is a John Parr soundtrack and a kickass montage. Join us them as we retread the steps that took Capcom to unexpected greatness and established a franchise to be forever remembered as one of the classics. Not many games make it to 25 and still look so spritely, after all...





“While Street Fighter II stands out as defining the franchise, each chapter has its own story to tell”

Street Fighter

Humble Beginnings

If it's true that the mightiest of oaks can grow from the smallest acorn, it's no great surprise that the unstoppable force that is the *Street Fighter* franchise came from something so microscopic in importance.

Street Fighter was just one of any number of competitive fighting games to emerge in the mid-to-late Eighties, the only things really separating it from the rest of the pack being little more than gimmicks – a deluxe version of the cabinet featured large pressure-sensitive buttons rather than the simpler version's six-button layout, while electing not to inform the player about the existence of Ryu's special moves gave the game an air of mystery and excitement. The deluxe cabinets were later phased out as, predictably, heavy-handed use in the search for the strongest attack led to damage, though the standard six-button system employed by many modern fighting games started life here.

While the game itself was somewhat unremarkable in many respects, it did help launch the careers of some big names in Japanese development. The production and direction team of Takashi Nishiyama and Hiroshi Matsumoto would go on to join SNK and work on rival franchises *Art Of Fighting* and *Fatal Fury*, while Mega Man legend Keiji Inafune got his break at Capcom drawing up character portraits for *Street Fighter*.

The game proved fairly popular despite its simple premise, later being ported to just about every major home computer system at the time to mixed effect. Tiertex, the studio responsible for handling the ports, even went so far as to release its own unofficial sequel in the form of *Human Killing Machine*, a fighter of questionable content based on the same engine as the version it developed for the ports of Capcom's game. Cheeky, perhaps, but the 8-bit era was hardly a hotbed of morality…



» [Arcade] Special move inputs don't always register properly, making on-demand fireballs tricky.



» Joe gets a little extra screen time in the game's intro, punching through a wall to set the scene for the fighting extravaganza. Yo, Joe!

> "Just one of many games looking to further the one-on-one fighter"

The Challengers

Ryu
Always searching for stronger opponents in order to develop his skills, Ryu embodies purity – while others seek fame and fortune, he seeks only to better himself. The face of the *Street Fighter* franchise and present in every single game to carry the name so far.

Ken
Ryu's sparring partner and friend, Ken Masters started out as an exact copy of the Japanese poster boy (and one that only appeared as player two's character in versus mode) but later developed his own traits. Fear his flaming Dragon Punch, and spamming thereof.

Retsu
A disgraced Kenpo instructor, Retsu is the first hurdle on your quest to winning the tournament. It's not hard to see why the bald guy hasn't appeared in another game since – he goes down easy and doesn't have much in the way of special attacks.

Geki
The generic ninja will see you now. The expected array of shuriken and teleport attacks are all accounted for in this rather bland character, but it takes external influence to flesh him out – according to the comics, he's an assassin from a rival clan to Ibuki's.

Joe
A kickboxer and the first of two American opponents in the original, Joe is nothing special. And while he may not have come back to the *Street Fighter* tournament, he may have been loitering outside – some suggest that he's the blonde dude in the original *Street Fighter II* intro.

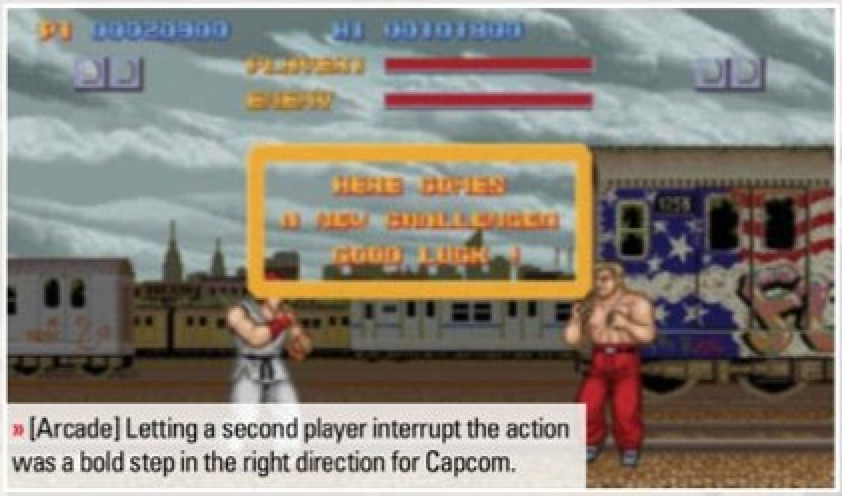
Mike
Legal issues forced Capcom to swap some of the character names in *Street Fighter II*, leading Capcom to argue that American boxer Mike and *SFII*'s Balrog (originally Mike Bison) are two separate characters. So that's canon now. Deal with it.



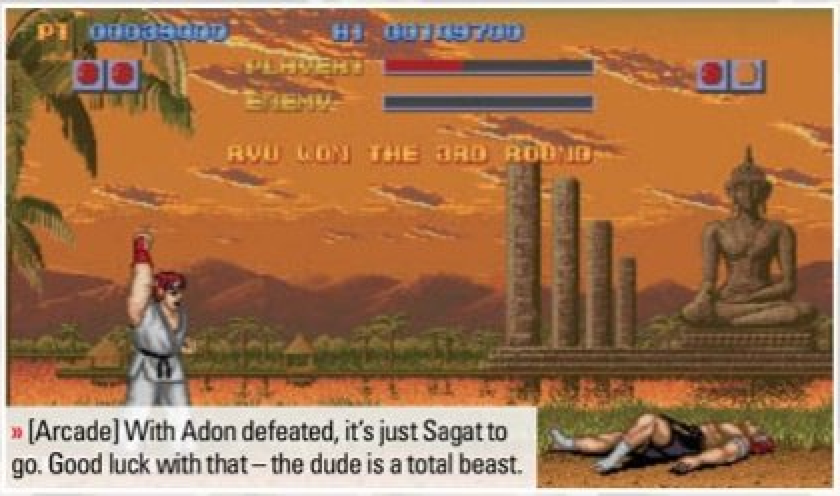
WHAT IT INTRODUCED
- Pressure-sensitive buttons to unleash various strengths of attack
- The now-standard six-button layout for fighting games
- Some of gaming's most iconic and popular characters



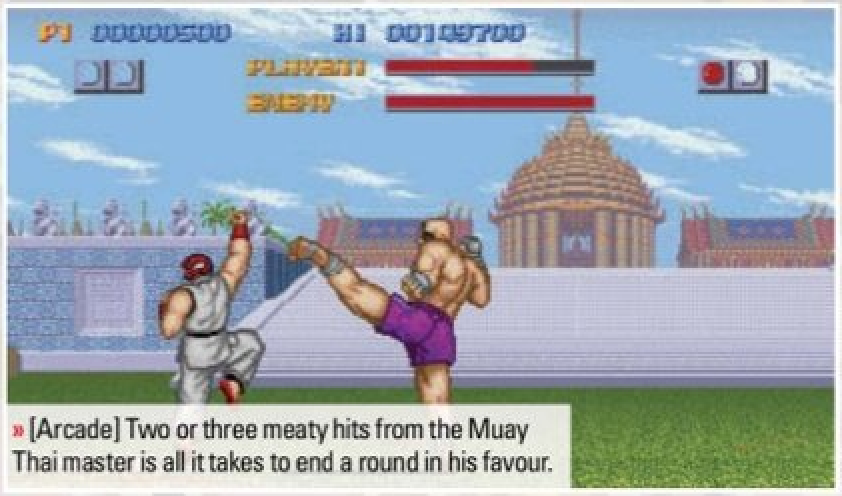
» [Arcade] Considering the artistry of later games, the original's portraits are ugly by comparison.



» [Arcade] Letting a second player interrupt the action was a bold step in the right direction for Capcom.



» [Arcade] With Adon defeated, it's just Sagat to go. Good luck with that – the dude is a total beast.


» [Arcade] Two or three meaty hits from the Muay Thai master is all it takes to end a round in his favour.

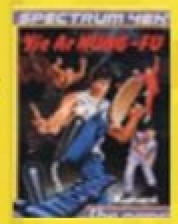
WHAT HAPPENED NEXT
Not very much, to be perfectly honest. *Street Fighter* was just one of many games looking to further develop the concept of the one-on-one fighter, though Capcom's take on the idea wasn't really that much more inventive or professional than any of its peers. Indeed, it was a fairly quiet few years for fight fans, following the release of *Street Fighter*, with very little on offer. Home computer gamers would enjoy the likes of Palace's far more satisfying *Barbarian* and EA's somewhat terrible *Budokan* for competitive fighting, but little did we know that Capcom was hard at work on a game that would change gaming history forever.

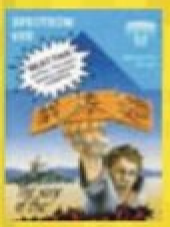
THE COMPETITION
It was an interesting time for the fighter, the genre still very much in its infancy. The few games *Street Fighter* had in the way of competition all found themselves in the same boat, albeit pushing in different directions, to try and turn an interesting concept into a clearly defined genre. *IK+* enjoyed some success, the three-way fights (and ability to drop your trousers) setting it apart from similar games, while various publishers would try other angles – *Barbarian* toyed with extreme violence, *Ninja Hamster* with cartoon-style silliness and *Galactic Warriors* with mech-based combat. Nobody had a clear advantage over the fledgling genre… well, not yet, at least.

BEFORE STREET FIGHTER

Heavyweight Champ

While not perhaps a spiritual forerunner to modern one-on-one fighters, Sega's arcade machine is acknowledged as being the first competitive fighting videogame. Side-on boxing isn't the best representation of the sport, mind.

Yie Ar Kung Fu

Konami's fighter paved the way for *Street Fighter* and the developer must have been kicking itself – *Yie Ar Kung Fu* is probably the better game, in truth, but Capcom beat Konami to the punch with a stellar sequel.

Way Of The Exploding Fist

A far more accurate portrayal of martial arts than one that includes blazing fireballs and gravity-defying spins, Beam's game worked on a points system rather than employing energy bars, just like real-life competitions.



Lee
Street Fighter's first wall (who you fight on the Great Wall Of China), Lee is about twice as fast as every character previously faced and relentless in his rushdown. Again, he's not come back to the competition, but there are reports that he could be Yun and Yang's uncle.



Gen
The geriatric Chinese assassin seems simple enough here, but later games reveal the intricacies of his fighting style – he's the only character in the *Street Fighter* roster that has two separate stances that completely change his arsenal of attacks.



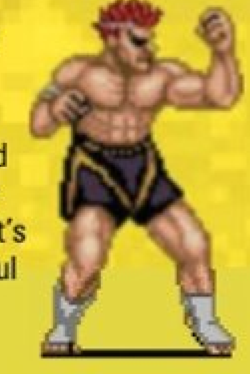
Birdie
England's burly punk hits hard, and that's enough – it only takes two or three successful hits for him to lay Ryu out. His speed isn't up to much, thankfully, so he's not all that much of a challenge, especially when kept at bay with a barrage of fireballs.



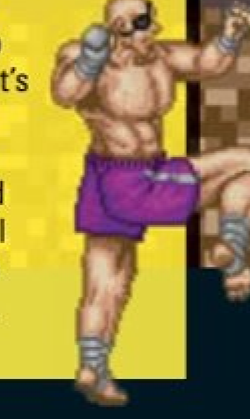
Eagle
Bringing tonfa to a fist fight isn't really on, but the second English fighter (who is also named after a golfing term – read into that what you will) does just that. The extra range serves him well, though the upper-class bouncer has nothing on Dudley's poise.



Adon
This Muay Thai expert turns the screen into a blur of legs that rips through Ryu's health bar, if you're not careful. His attacks favour speed over brute force, as is demonstrated by his Jaguar style to Sagat's more powerful Tiger style.



Sagat
You've faced the expert, now here's the master. Brutal damage and moves for all occasions make him a tough adversary, though Ryu will always come out on top eventually – that's why Sagat has that nasty scar on his chest and bears an eternal grudge towards Japan's finest…

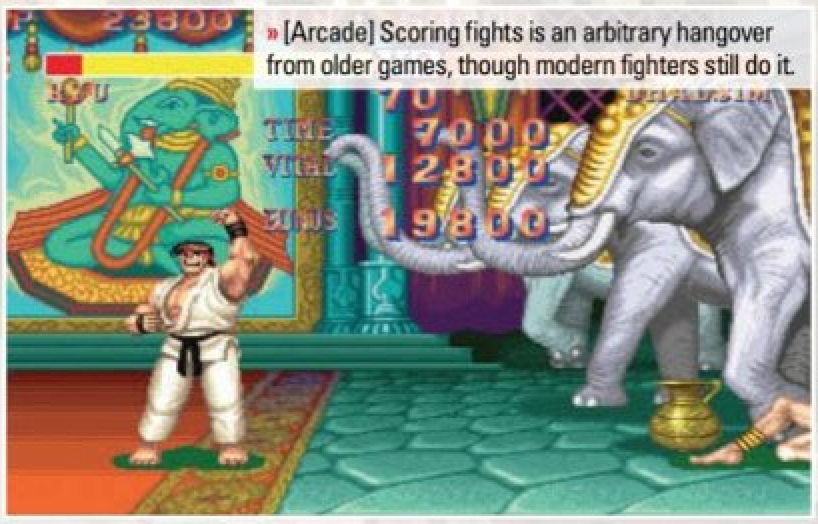


Street Fighter II: The Game That Changed Everything

Quite how Capcom went from shipping such a run-of-the-mill fighter to creating one of the most important games of all time in the space of one sequel is beyond us. But everything about *Street Fighter II* is just… *right*. The cast of characters, spanning a handful of stereotypes and clichés, are easy to identify with. The controls, now tuned to actually keep up with quick player input and properly register special move commands, are fluid and responsive. And the music… Main composer Yoko Shimomura may not have been particularly fond of fighters but she absolutely nailed it with the amazing selection of character-specific themes. You only have to look at all the cover versions, remixes and repurposed theme tunes that litter the Internet to see just how much impact these pieces of music have had.

> "SFII's influence on the genre and on gaming cannot be understated"

Even when it got things wrong, *Street Fighter II* still ended up being right. The ability to cancel normal moves into specials was, believe it or not, a bug rather than a design choice – a bug that has shaped an entire genre and one that without which the fighting game as we know it would be really quite different. The concept was later embraced by Capcom, who developed it into a fully-fledged feature with hit counters and everything, though it's hard to believe that just a staple of the genre came about by accident.



» [Arcade] Scoring fights is an arbitrary hangover from older games, though modern fighters still do it.



» Beating Bison is no mean feat, especially if the arcade owner has bumped up the difficulty.



The New Challengers

Guile
A US Air Force pilot looking to defeat Bison and avenge his deceased friend and comrade, Charlie. While he has only two special moves, they work so well in tandem that he doesn't need any more. And yes, Guile's theme *does* go with everything.

Blanka
Gaming's most notable wildman, Jimmy Blanka was raised in the jungle after a plane crash (which gave him control over electricity…). The manual describes his fighting style as Capoeira, which is obviously bollocks. He's just crazy.

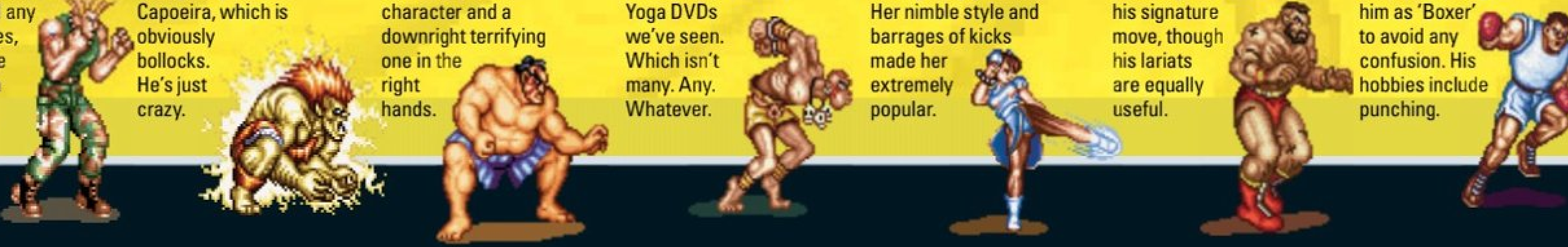
E. Honda
Throwing yourself headfirst at opponents and slapping them infinite times aren't exactly traditional Sumo techniques, we feel, though Honda has made them his own. A powerful character and a downright terrifying one in the right hands.

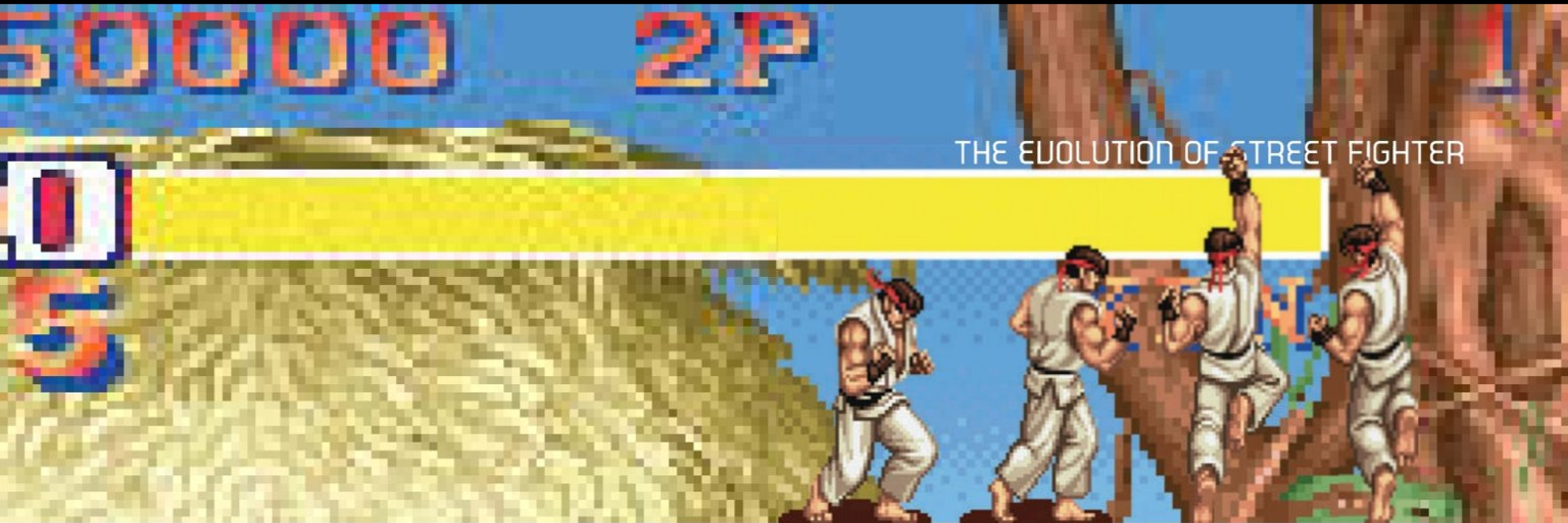
Dhalsim
Stretch Armstrong's Indian cousin has unparalleled range, due to his mastery of Yoga. He can breathe fire and later teleport too, which aren't things that have been covered in any Yoga DVDs we've seen. Which isn't many. Any. Whatever.

Chun-Li
An undercover agent out to avenge her father's death at the hands of M. Bison, Chun-Li is notable as one of the first female competitors to feature in a fighting game. Her nimble style and barrages of kicks made her extremely popular.

Zangief
The Red Cyclone is Russia's finest wrestler and let's be honest here – who wouldn't be intimidated by a guy that practiced his moves on bears? His 360-degree input command throw Spinning Piledriver is his signature move, though his lariats are equally useful.

Balrog
No, it's not Mike from the original game. Remember? Capcom said so, so it must be true. He's still called M. Bison in the Japanese games, so people have taken to simply referring to him as 'Boxer' to avoid any confusion. His hobbies include punching.





Regardless, its influence both on the genre and on gaming in general cannot be understated. This was the game that developed the idea of direct competition rather than asynchronous, back-and-forth score attack. This was the game that cemented the idea of having separate characters with unique move sets as a must-have feature. And this is the game that, for many, represented the first steps into the world of gaming, be it a daunting few plays in a dingy arcade or the thrill of having what seemed like a perfect arcade game in your own home. This was the game that changed *everything*.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

The insane popularity of the arcade original spawned myriad home conversions and coin-op updates, some less legitimate than others. The SNES port was, for a long time, the most faithful home conversion and remarkably, it's still to this day Capcom's best-selling game. The first official arcade variant came in the form of *Champion Edition*, letting players use the four boss characters and addressing several issues, while *Hyper Fighting* was Capcom's way of going toe-to-toe with all the board hacks doing the rounds. *Super* later added new four characters, with *SSFII Turbo* finally unleashing Super Combos on the world.

THE COMPETITION

The cutthroat arcade scene wasted little time in jumping on *Street Fighter II*'s spectacular success and for several years, the market was awash with fighters looking to pull the rug out from under Capcom's accidental classic. SNK came to the fore during this time, with *Fatal Fury, Art Of Fighting, Samurai Shodown* and *King Of Fighters* all emerging in the space of a few years with slightly different takes on the one-on-one brawler. Midway's *Mortal Kombat* was another key competitor, digitised graphics and controversial levels of gore helping it to mainstream success. Even home platform exclusives started trying to best official ports of the Capcom game; the likes of Team 17's *Body Blows, Eternal Champions* and *Clayfighter* were among those that wanted a slice of this booming genre.

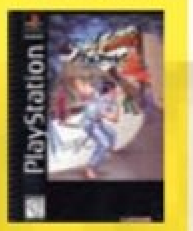


WHAT IT INTRODUCED

- Selectable characters for unprecedented depth and replayability
- The fighting genre's first example of a combo system, albeit by mistake
- The very notion of competitive gaming as an alternative to taking turns and comparing scores

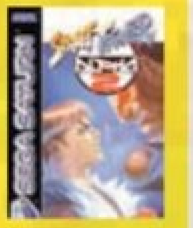
OTHER STREET FIGHTERS

Street Fighter Alpha: Warrior's Dreams



Developed as a prequel series to *Street Fighter II*, the *Alpha* games fleshed out the characters and introduced new ones to develop the franchise's universe. Technical elements like the super meter arrived, as did new features like the Alpha Counter.

Street Fighter Alpha 2



A continuation of the original *Alpha*'s ideas, *Alpha 2* introduced Custom Combos – a system that let players burn super gauge in order to unleash unique strings of moves and specials that might not otherwise combo. Oh, and a handful of new characters too.

Street Fighter Alpha 3



The pinnacle of the sub-series and still one of the greatest fighters ever made. Selectable fighting styles and a wealth of characters offered even greater freedom and depth – hardly surprising, seeing as how this came out after *Street Fighter III*.

Vega

Another name swap victim, the clawed cage fighter's Japanese name of Balrog actually makes far more sense. His arrogance and grace in battle make him a love/hate character, though most that have faced a skilled Vega player will probably lean towards hate.

M. Bison

The Shadaloo boss and final opponent in *SFII* (Vega in the Japanese version, to tie up the name-swap silliness), Bison's Psycho Power gives him incredible combat potential. If you've not screamed his name in frustration, you didn't grow up in the Nineties.

Cammy

Both British secret service agent and former Shadaloo puppet, Cammy's past is somewhat messy but that's not to say it hasn't made her an exceptional fighter. Simple to use, quick and relatively powerful, she's probably one of the best all-round fighters in the series.

T. Hawk

One of *SF*'s worst cases of racial stereotyping, Native American combatant T. Hawk (or Thunder Hawk to his friends) actually fills a gap in the roster pretty well – a large, heavy-hitting character that doesn't have to rely on grapples. Not that that makes it okay.

Dee Jay

The only character in the series designed by Capcom US and among the most hated. Coincidence? Another iffy racial stereotype, mainly notable for his 'Maximum' trousers – a word that would read the same vertically on both sides of the screen.

Fei Long

Yeah, okay, so the new challengers were all pretty much dodgy stereotypes. Still, Fei Long's kung fu skills offered a far closer representation of a real martial art than anything presented by the series so far, hence him becoming a fairly popular addition to the roster.

Akuma

The embodiment of evil and the antithesis of Ryu. He's the younger brother of Ryu and Ken's sensei and has gone totally off the rails in his search for ultimate power. A recurring secret boss in the franchise – be on the lookout for his Raging Demon. You might want to jump.

Street Fighter III

DESPERATE TIMES...

With the world and its dog having developed a bunch of 2D fighters and saturated the market to the point where not even the hardcore could really bring themselves to care, the late Nineties wasn't a good time to be a beat-'em-up fan. Capcom had been plugging away with the *Street Fighter* brand through the popular *Alpha* spin-off franchise but when it came to develop a full sequel, apathy had set in within the fighting community to a dangerous degree. And with 3D fighters starting to really come into their own as well, it seemed like Capcom was fighting a losing battle.

But determined to buck the trend and take back its crown from the genre's new 3D pretenders, Capcom came good with a gorgeous and inventive return to form. A brand new cast (with the exception of returning fighters Ryu and Ken) gave willing players an entire new roster of archetypes to learn and the Parry system – while not exactly embraced at the time of release – would go on to create a moment that will go down in gaming history forever. At the Evo 2003 tournament, the high-level feature seemed like something beyond the grasp of many, but when Daigo parried all 15 hits of Justin Wong's Chun-Li Super Art and responded with a perfect combo to win, the room erupted and the entire world stopped to take notice of fighters once more. There could literally have been no better advert for *3rd Strike*.



» [Xbox 360] Some players could never bring themselves to fly the nest, sticking with good ol' Ryu and Ken.

> " SFIII was determined to take back its crown from the new 3D pretenders "

» [Xbox 360] Backgrounds and music stack up beautifully with the gorgeous sprites and animation.



WHAT IT INTRODUCED

- The Parry system, a risk/reward mechanic for advanced players
- Selectable Super Arts, offering several ways to play each character
- True juggle combos, allowing quick players to land extra hits on airborne opponents

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

With the 3D boom and the almost entirely new cast causing *III* to be far less of a success story than its predecessor, Capcom pulled its old trick with a pair of updates to the arcade version. *2nd Impact* brought several new characters, the ability to escape throws and the first example of EX special moves, while *3rd Strike* arrived a good two years later, bringing with it yet more new fighters, a refined input system for advanced abilities and balance tweaks that would make it perhaps the greatest 2D fighter ever made. Stellar Dreamcast ports of the first two games (as the *Double Impact* collection) and *3rd Strike* brought the action home, plus it would later appear alongside *Hyper Street Fighter II* on the *Anniversary Collection*, released for PlayStation 2 and Xbox to mark 15 years of the franchise.

THE COMPETITION

Capcom's rivals had really started to establish themselves by this point, although the real threat didn't come from Midway or from SNK – it came from polygons. With PlayStation taking then-revolutionary

THE NEW CHALLENGERS

Makoto
The young Japanese Karate expert isn't for everyone, though her rushdown style makes her *Street Fighter III*'s glass cannon – land your big combo and you've probably won but sit back and defend and it's as good as over.

Q
Street Fighter's mystery man, little is known about what Q actually is. Favouring brute force over speed and lengthy combos, he's a fierce opponent in the right hands, not least because his taunt ups his defence by a *lot*.

Remy
France's answer to Guile is far more delicate and elegant than his military analog, though he's not much less dangerous. His extra special moves also make him a somewhat more interesting character to learn.

Twelve
The gooey experiment that is Twelve is probably the worst character in *SFIII*, though many have learned him for just that reason – nobody expects his bizarre fighting style, and with powers of flight and invisibility, he can be tricky to catch.

Alex
Another brawler, albeit one with a few more tricks up his sleeve than usual. Originally intended as a replacement for *SFII* frontmen Ryu and Ken, his play-style didn't help him fit this role, nor did the fact that they both came back.

Dudley
A gentleman boxer is the perfect counterpoint to Balrog's bullish approach to fisticuffs – Dudley's butler is always on hand and the pugilist can even throw roses with his taunt, a makeshift projectile perfect for carving an opening.

Elena
If you thought Chun-Li was all legs, you ain't seen nothing yet. Elena's stunning animation remains one of the highlights of *SFIII*, those stupidly long legs flailing around the screen constantly and many of her specials linking together into one fluid combo.

Ibuki
The original has generic ninja Geki but *SFIII* gets the far more interesting Ibuki, another fragile character that excels in rushdown play and in confusing the opponent into making mistakes. Her taunt reverses the opponent's controls briefly, if successful.





» [Xbox 360] In truth, Sean's move pool isn't dreadful – it's his lack of priority really hurts him.



» [Xbox 360] Yun is by far the better of the Lee twins, although Yang's style still won him plenty of fans.

strides in 3D home gaming and arcade boards growing more powerful at a shocking rate, 3D fighting games like *Virtua Fighter*, *Tekken* and *Soul Blade* proved far more interesting and novel to gamers than the sprite-based visuals they had been fighting with for a decade. Despite dwindling interest in traditional 2D fighters, the push for quality resulted in some of history's finest fighters – *3rd Strike* is without doubt Capcom's best while SNK's answer, *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*, is right up there as well. What, no love for *Mortal Kombat*? No. Move along.

OTHER STREET FIGHTERS

Street Fighter EX



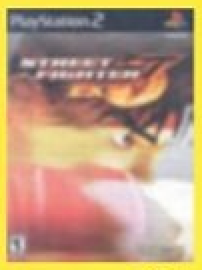
With the 3D revolution in full swing, Capcom didn't want to be too late to the party it helped start. It did, however, turn up horrifically dressed and half-cut – *Street Fighter*, it seemed, was not cut out for life in 3D.

Street Fighter EX2



But that didn't stop a sequel from surfacing, improving matters slightly but still not to an extent where the game has any worth above 2D versions of the game. A side mode did pave the way for *SFIV*'s character-specific Trials, though.

Street Fighter EX3



A PlayStation 2 launch title, but not one of the better ones. The same dodgy 3D visuals returned, joined this time by a tag mechanic similar to the *Versus* series and *Tekken Tag Tournament*. Not one of the series' high points.



» [Xbox 360] Letting Q taunt isn't the best idea – even with Urien setting up Aegis Reflectors everywhere, the robotic freak is still a monster after a taunt or two...

> "The real threat didn't come from Midway or SNK, it came from polygons"

Necro
SFIII's version of Blanka, if you will, replete with an electrocution attack and a screen-spanning spin, albeit horizontally rather than vertically. He's not much of a threat, but you can't help but feel for a character who has to apologise every time he's late.

Oro
Two arms? Sod that, Oro can beat you with just one. Among the franchise's oddest fighters, this old guy's unconventional style won him few fans at launch, but the fact that he's mained by one of the UK's best players, Zak Bennett, shows there's something there...

Sean
If you wake up in a fighting game one day and your Super Art is a one-hit fireball, it shouldn't take too long to work out that you're a joke character. Sean is *SFIII*'s Dan, then – no amount of training under that filthy scrub Ken is going to do anyone any good, after all.

Yun
Genei Jin *is* Yun. His third Super Art lets him stylishly link almost any of his specials into one destructive combo with the right execution, making him a perfect choice for high level players. Doing one damage, his hat spin taunt is perfect for trolling.

Yang
The runt of the litter, Yang started life as a palette swap of Yun but later got given his own moves and abilities. Which, sadly, made him worse. He's a decent fighter, though his custom combo Super Art is nothing compared to Genei Jin.

Gill
The game's every-bit-as-cheap-as-expected boss, Gill can either use his super gauge to rain fire down on the screen for insane damage (even if blocked) or conserve it to resurrect when defeated. And if that's not cheap, we don't know what is.

Urien
A rushdown charge character is a rare beast indeed, and Urien fills the role brilliantly. He could probably do with wearing more than just a pair of pants when going into a fight, though his crazy combo potential makes up for his inability to dress himself.

Hugo
He's number one, apparently. *SFIII*'s Zangief equivalent as no less than three command grabs (and two more in his Super Arts), but he has more ways to close distance than the Russian ever did. Don't expect that to make him easy to play, though...



Street Fighter IV: A Legend Is Reborn

The eight years between *Street Fighter EX3* and *IV* represented the longest the series had ever gone without a new game, largely because many senior Capcom figures weren't exactly behind the project. But relatively unknown Capcom producer Yoshinori Ono pushed relentlessly for a new *Street Fighter* game despite opposition from his peers and superiors.

After the roaring success of the HD remake of *Super Street Fighter II*, though, the Capcom suits were left little choice but to sit up and pay attention to Ono, who was put in charge of bringing back *Street Fighter* properly. The thinking behind the belated comeback was simple – set between *SFII* and *SFIII*, *Street Fighter IV* would bring back the entire cast of world warriors from the series' most popular game while mirroring its accessibility.

SFIV was designed to be instantly familiar and that proved to be one of the core strengths of this late return. But as well as ensuring a low entry barrier and a balanced playing field, Capcom also did a great job of making *IV* a multi-tiered affair that could be employed by players of all skill levels. Take the Focus Attack, for example. Newcomers could use it to stun hesitant opponents for a free combo, intermediate players could use its armour properties to absorb single blows in a similar way to *SFIII*'s Parry (using a dash to cancel recovery or activation of the actual attack) while pros could use it to cancel attacks, leading to some of the game's flashiest combos. The comeback mechanic, Ultra Combos, offered similar depth – many newcomers could throw out hopeful Ultras, but most characters could combo into their ultimate attacks with the right set-up. *Street Fighter* was back on top.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT

With the current hardware generation poised to overflow with me-too shooters, Capcom's timing in bringing back *Street Fighter* was absolutely perfect. Long-dormant fighting fans rose from their slumber to seek out arcade units, with the improved home version bringing competitive fighting back to the masses just like *SFII* had done 17 years before. The *Super* version added new characters and selectable Ultra Combos, and *Arcade Edition* bringing a further four to bring it in line with the latest coin-op version.





» [Xbox 360] Some characters, such as Gen, can combo from Super Combos into Ultra Combos.

THE NEW CHALLENGERS

Abel
French amnesiac Abel remembers nothing of his past… except for massively complicated close-combat moves. It's likely that he was a discarded prototype in the program that led to the creation of *SFIV*'s boss, Seth.

C. Viper
Many claim she looks more like an SNK character than a Capcom one but Viper fits into the *SFIV* cast just fine. Her combat suit lets her burn and electrocute, with jump jets in her heels making her one of two with a Super Jump.

Cody
Final Fight veteran Cody makes his return here, after debuting in the *Alpha* sub-series. He's still rocking the convict look and chucks stones around like a child, plus he's apparently even left a knife on the floor in every place he might go.

Dan
The series' leading joke character makes his main series debut, having been formally introduced as a parody of the way SNK were thought to be ripping off Capcom's fighters. And the strangest part about him? He's not actually rubbish.

El Fuerte
It might have a couple of wrestlers already but Fuerte's spindly form, crazy speed and Lucha Libre skills set him apart from the stocky grapplers. He's an annoyance as much as a usable character, mostly because he never shuts up.

Evil Ryu
What would happen if Ryu's search for power took him down a darker path? He'd get a few new moves and be better at fighting, apparently. Makes perfect sense. Another *Alpha* callback, Evil Ryu entered the fray in *Arcade Edition*.

Gouken
'You must defeat Sheng Long to stand a chance', reads Ryu's original *SFII* victory quote. Well, now's your chance. Gouken *is* Sheng Long, Ryu and Ken's former master making his first playable appearance here. Not just an April Fool's joke, then…

Guy
Another *Final Fight* star, leaving Haggar as the only absentee. Still, he's busy fighting Galactus in *Marvel Vs Capcom 3*. Guy's American ninja awesome-looking combos won him many fans – we like him for his 'Profound… sadness…' win quote.

THE COMPETITION

Although the 2D fighter had been in hibernation for many a year, the odd quality example had still been trickling through – Arc's *Guilty Gear* franchise had evolved into something really special, while new IP *Battle Fantasia* captured some of the parrying magic of *SFIII*. Still, it's been *BlazBlue* that has offered the stiffest traditional competition to *SFIV*, the stunning 2D fighter playing as great as it looks, if perhaps without *IV*'s accessibility. 3D fighters have hit an all time high too, with *SoulCalibur*, *VF*, *Tekken* and even *DOA* better now than ever before. *Street Fighter* still just about rules – even with super-ridiculous crossover games wowing audiences with their nonsensical firework displays – but it's nowhere near the foregone conclusion it once was…

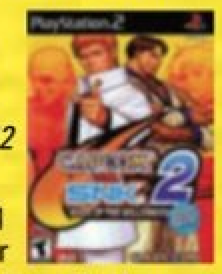
OTHER STREET FIGHTERS

Marvel Super Heroes Vs Street Fighter



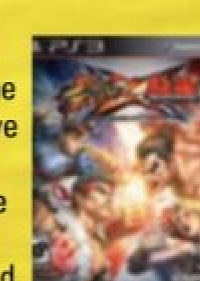
Pitting Marvel's finest nonsense warriors against a host of Capcom's martial artists may not have seemed fair. But by turning everything up to 11, Capcom managed to make it a frenetic and exciting crossover.

Capcom Vs SNK 2: Mark Of The Millennium 2001



Not strictly a *Street Fighter* game perhaps but Capcom's representatives in *CVS2* came predominantly from its leading fighting brand. Of all of the older crossover fighters, this is easily the one that still holds up best.

Street Fighter X Tekken



While hardly retro (on account of having come out this year, *SFXT* gave a mammoth cast of *Street Fighter* stars the chance to beat down 3D fighting's finest. And they did – though the *SF* guys and gals work way better in a 2D game.

WHAT IT INTRODUCED

- The Focus Attack: a chargeable crumple that absorbs blows and can be used to cancel attacks
- Full online integration, turning the whole world into your very own arcade
- Trials mode, an inventive way of practically teaching combos and skills



» [Xbox 360] Dan used to be a joke character but in *SSFIV*, he's not entirely awful. Good, almost. Wow.

> " Capcom's timing in bringing back Street Fighter was perfect "

Hakan

What *is* Hakan…? He's red, has blue egg cartons on his head and fights by smearing himself in oil then throwing people around.

Juri

The hot-headed Korean S.I.N. agent was reportedly added in at the request of Capcom Korea, but her origin doesn't alter that she's an awesome character both to watch and play. She's also *Street Fighter*'s only Taekwondo practitioner to date.

Rose

The *Alpha* games gave us some great characters, with many of the best returning in *IV* and its variants. She was decent in vanilla *IV* but really came into her own in *Super*, with her second Ultra Combo, Soul Satellite.

Rufus

The fat guy hates Ken, so we really identify with him. Like *Tekken*'s Bob, his size belies his speed and with dive kicks and screen-spanning assaults aplenty, he's a force to be reckoned with. His moves flow so beautifully, he's a joy to play.

Sakura

Ryu's protégé and another *Alpha* alumnus, Sakura returns in *IV* to offer players her own Hurricane Kicks, Dragon Punches and fireballs. Not the strongest, but tweaks to her abilities in *Super* made her more viable.

Seth

Named after former Capcom community manager and fighting game champ Seth Killian, this blue monster is *IV*'s final boss. And like Gill before him, he's supremely cheap. Not so much when you play *as* him rather than against him, mind…

Oni

Evil Akuma probably wouldn't have made much sense, so Capcom instead settled on Oni. That's what he is, though – a blazing, even-more-powerful version of the famous hidden boss. He even has a version of the Raging Demon that can be performed in the air.

THE WORLD WARRIORS




BIRDIE
ZANGIEF
NECRO
GOUKEN
MAKOTO
E.HONDA
RETSU
EAGLE
RUSSIA
ONI
SAKURA
IBUKI
AKUMA
GEKI
ORO
RYU
V.S.S.R.
JAPAN
JAPAN
JAPAN
EVIL RYU
HONG KONG
CHINA
THAILAND
INDIA
HONGKONG
CHINA
INDIA
SOUTH KOREA
TURKEY
THAILAND
YANG
CHUN-LI
JURI
FEI LONG
YUN
HAKAN
ADON
DAN
LEE
DHALISM
SAGAT
GEN

Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come







INFO

- **Featured System:** PS2
- **Year Released:** 2006
- **Publisher:** Koei
- **Developer:** Atlus
- **Key People:** Katsura Hashino (director), Shigenori Soejima (art director), Shoji Meguro (composer)

GO DEEPER

- **In a NES-style publishing folly, the European version of *Persona 3* was released a year and a half after the Japanese edition.**
- **Most Persona designs and abilities are shared with the other *Megami Tensei* titles, though ake place in the same universe.**

25. SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: PERSONA 3

***Persona 3* is a rare JRPG that smartly lets an intriguing day-to-day school and social life story take precedence over tiresome grinding for levels…**

THE BACKGROUND

The *Megami Tensei* series had been around since the SNES era, and during that time, the art direction that made the series popular was handled by the esteemed Kazuma Kaneko. For *Persona 3*, his assistant, Shigenori Soejima, took over, imbuing this new title with a trendier art style that ensured it was the most popular title in this series for years, especially in the West, boosted mainly by the game's contemporary character designs. In relation to the other *Persona* titles, this represented an enormous creative sea change. Soejima's creation of modern-looking young adult characters meant that the series suddenly found a large audience within the realms of anime culture.

Yet this wasn't the only big behind-the-scenes move for the *Persona* series, as the third instalment saw director Katsura Hashino tackling a great deal of the scenario writing for the first time, too, which lent the game a different flavour to previous entries. Hashino was later surprised that *Persona 3*'s focus on the daily lives of Japanese students struck such a chord overseas.

In the West, an impressive localisation effort combined with some minor controversy garnered from the game's Evoker idea – where the teenage characters summon Persona creatures by appearing to shoot themselves in the head – helped garner *Persona 3* a significant amount of attention, as well as praise for the standard of its voice-acting.

THE GAME

It may initially sound like a strange comparison, but *Persona 3* has a lot in common with *Shenmue* and its sequel. Like Yu Suzuki's divisive Dreamcast adventures, the game presents a compelling role-playing experience through the prism of real life.

Persona 3 asks the question of how you spend your days in the same way that *Shenmue* does, having the player live through a calendar year in

Things of note



Persona FEStival

Being one of Atlus's highest-selling games ever, a Capcom-style reissue was released a year later, with around 30 hours of extra story content for the hardcore *Persona* fan.



PSPersona

An enhanced port of *Persona 3* made its way to the PSP in Europe last year, and the choice of male and female protagonists opens up a lot of new Social Link options in the story.



Suicide shooting

One of the more controversial images sees characters appearing to shoot themselves in the head with handguns (called 'Evokers') in order to activate their Personas.



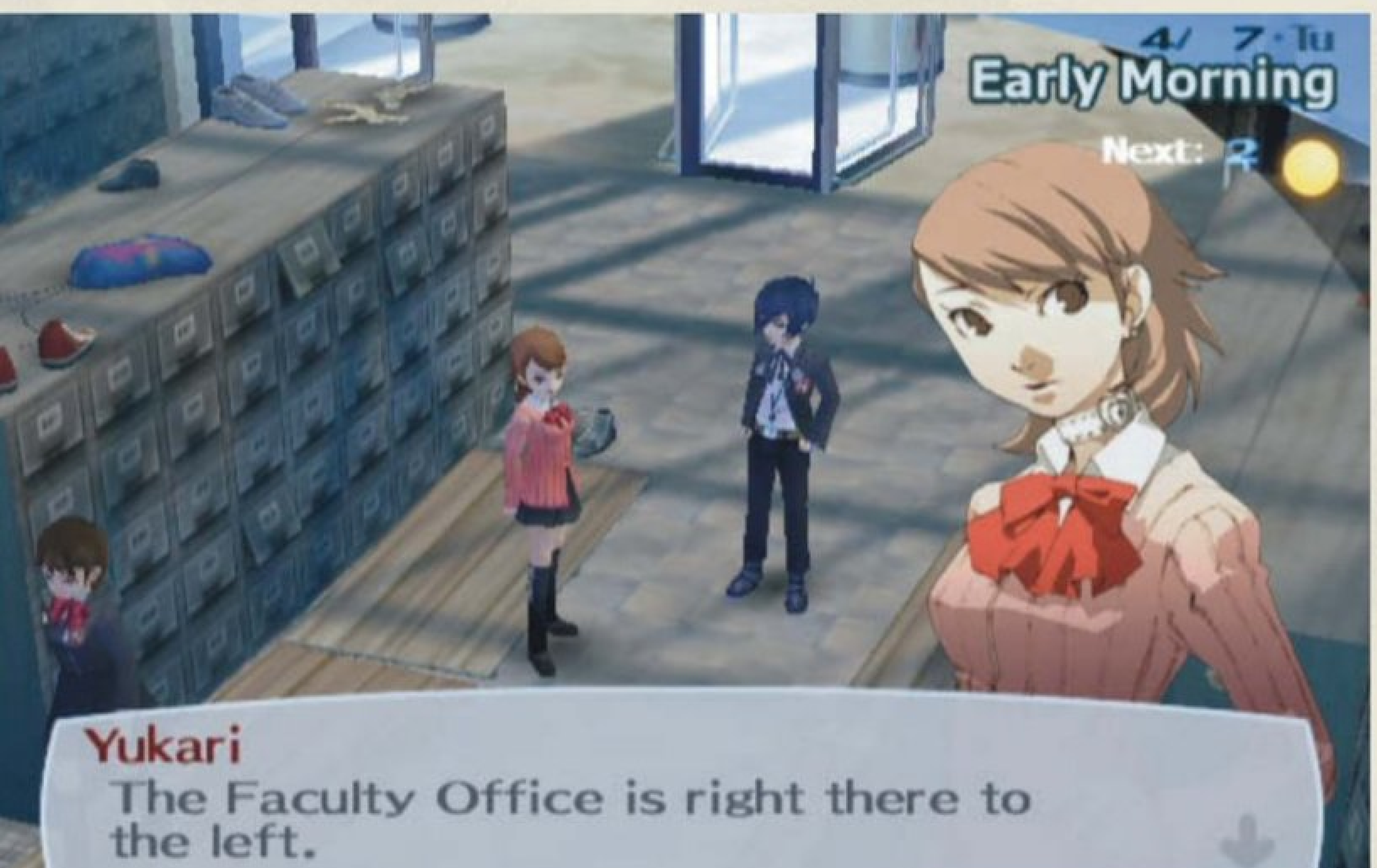
The story continues

Set ten years after *Persona 3* and not considered part of the series' canon, the anime *Trinity Soul* was dubbed into English in 2010, making the perfect gift for completists.



Calling Catherine

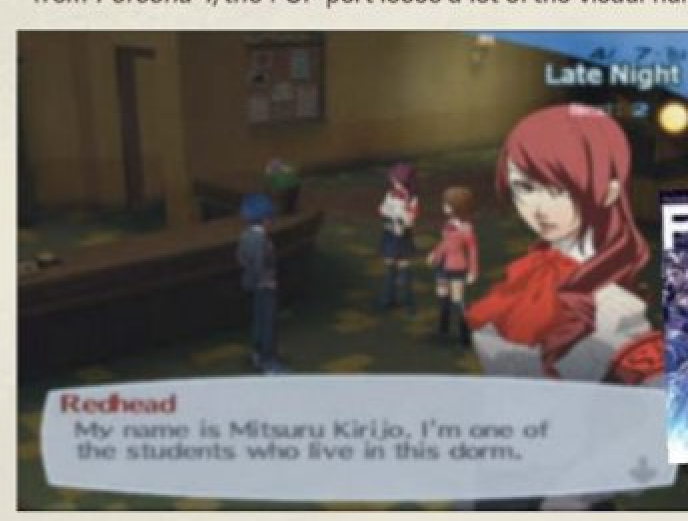
Sharing some of *Persona 3*'s DNA, art direction and character interaction, fans of the game should check out Atlus's *Catherine*, which features musical references to *P3*.



» [PS2] Just hanging around in the school or dorm, chatting to the other characters, is fun in its own way.



» [PS2] The PS2 *FES* version is the definitive edition. Though admirably handled and borrowing advancements from *Persona 4*, the PSP port loses a lot of the visual flair.



What the press thought

RPGFan
Score: 96%
"I loved *Persona 3*. It delivered an experience that was both novel and familiar. *MegaTen* fan or not, I wholeheartedly recommend this game to all RPG fans."



Play
Score: 64%
"It's the story that lets it down more than anything, because it feels like playing an anime that you'd rather not watch."





» [PS2] Fusing Personas is probably the most interesting aspect of the night sections, allowing players to create superior creatures from weaker ones.

the life of a school kid in a town rich with part-time jobs, students to socialise with and clubs to join. Meanwhile, during the night, *Persona 3* transforms into a traditional but nevertheless compelling turn-based RPG, having the players manoeuvre through hundreds of randomly generated floors in a dark tower called Tartarus, battling monsters. Atlus creates a cohesive RPG out of two opposing styles of gameplay, carried off with a high degree of personality that makes it obsessively engaging.

The character interactions and school scenes feel so detailed that you can't help feeling that the day-to-day life of the protagonist reflects the past experiences of the creators. *Persona 3* walks the fine line between visual novel and traditional RPG, making the typically mundane situations in life seem thrilling simply based on the strength of its own gameplay systems.

In turn, those interactions feed back into the Tartarus sections, with Social Links forged during the day helping the player's RPG progression at night by strengthening your Personas, which are essentially summon creatures. Despite being vastly dissimilar in gameplay styles, the day and night elements function symbiotically. A lot of developers face the trouble of trying to bring endless combat sections and a logical story together in a way that seems natural; *Persona 3* doesn't try to do that, instead building the game around a structure that allows the player to choose when to focus on each element.

It takes an enormous amount of confidence to throw so much of a game's emphasis behind a story in this way, but that's exactly why *Persona 3* emerged as a creative bright spot in the declining JRPG sub-genre over the last decade. There's nothing revolutionary about the turn-based stuff, as such, yet the way the story is handled feels like a vision of what the future of interactive narrative could be: taking an unusual premise for a videogame and just allowing players to live in that environment, as a simulation, letting them engage with the world before them as they see fit.

Why it's a future classic

Stylishly executed and smartly designed, *Persona 3* is against the tide of pretty much everything in its own genre and perhaps even its own industry. Only Atlus is making games like this, and while *Persona 4* offers an equally rich world to interact with, the third instalment was such a refreshing change of pace for the RPG. It demonstrates how lazily many primary genres are handled in modern games development, showing that merging existing ideas – in this case, from an RPG and Japanese character simulation – can produce something that feels new. The *MegaTen* series has a lot of different offshoots, all of which garner a similar level of praise from critics, but there's something about existing as a person in the 'real' world that resonates with us more than anything else in Atlus's canon.

THE MAKING OF

KANE I & II



Forget a fistful of dollars, two pounds was all you needed to grab each of Ma[redacted]he games: Martyn Carroll discovers how programmer John [redacted] Darnell went low rent on the high plains

You have to hand it to Mastertronic. In 1983, when other publishers were pushing up software prices, Mastertronic showed up and started banging out games that retailed for a couple of quid. They were cheap and they were prevalent – masterful distribution arrangements saw racks of games suddenly appear in newsagents, video shops and petrol stations. Mastertronic and its ever-growing catalogue of budget-priced titles changed the market.

The quality of the games themselves varied greatly. For every classic like *Kikstart* or *Finders Keepers* there were probably ten turgid efforts. *Kane* was neither a diamond nor a dud, instead falling among the majority of Mastertronic games that were simply 'well worth the money'. At full price it may have been spurned, but £1.99 was a fair price to pay for several scenes of rootin', tootin' cowboy action.

Kane was a quintessential budget title, yet it actually began life as a full price game at Liverpool-based publisher Software Projects. Its developer was John Darnell, whose coding career began when he found himself out of work in 1981, aged 24. "I was offered a government-sponsored training course to learn to program in assembly language," he says. "On the course I discovered I had a natural talent for programming. After the course I spent a couple of years working in a Christian community and then I started applying for computing jobs in 1984. To my amazement Software Projects gave me a job, even though I had no experience in games. I think they liked me."

The bosses at Software Projects liked John enough to entrust him with their platforming icon, *Miner Willy*. "I taught myself 6502 assembly language and wrote a game called *Sleepwalker* for the Commodore 64 which was never released. Satisfied that I could code, the directors asked me to do the C64 version of *Jet Set Willy II*."

Having finished the *Miner Willy* sequel (working alongside Steve Birtles), John began developing the game that would eventually become *Kane*. Yet initially the design was more *Das Boot* than *Boot Hill*. "I discussed with one of the directors, Alan Maton, an idea for a C64 game about submarines," he reveals. "Alan said okay and I started writing a game. Since there were no graphic artists in the company at that time, I started

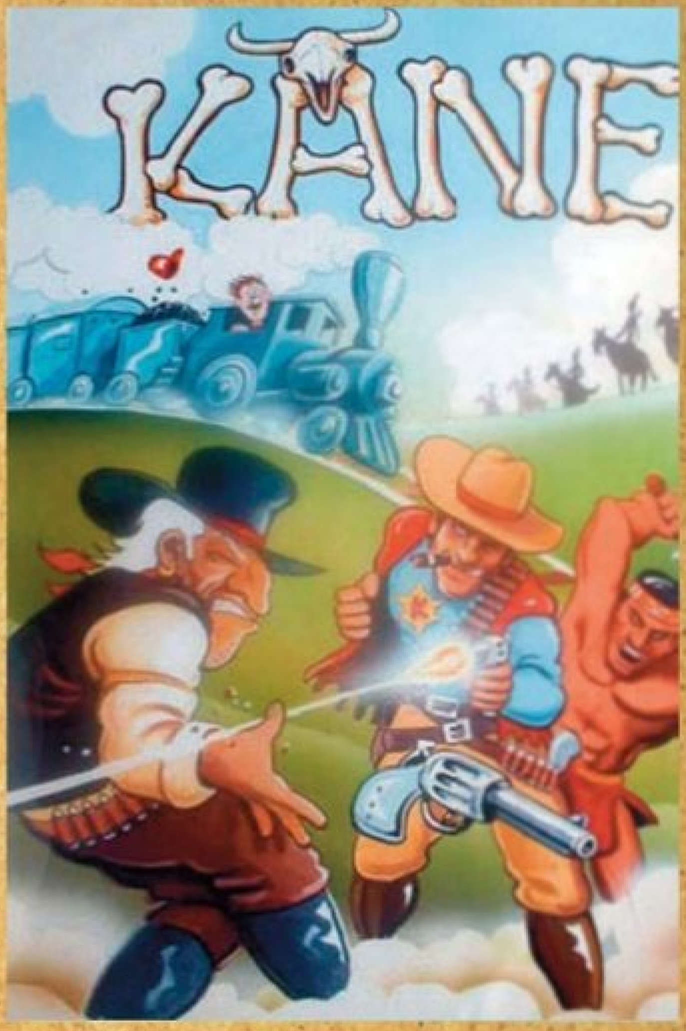


drawing an underground submarine base using a KoalaPad digitiser. It looked nothing like what I wanted, but the perspective reminded me of a Wild West street, so somehow it morphed into a shootout scene! I loved shooting air rifles at funfairs – the white target would mechanically slide into a window and you had to aim and shoot before it disappeared. So that's what I put in the game. Once the idea of a Wild West game was conceived, the bow and arrow scene was a logical progression. The whole of *Kane* was unplanned. Each scene was basically 'Hey, that's a great idea! Let's test it and see if it works'."

With the static shootouts in place, John looked to change the pace of the gameplay by dropping the game's hero, Marshall McGraw, on horseback. For these scenes, he was in need of a steed and found one right on his doorstep. "Software Projects had just released *Harvey Smith Showjumper*. The programmer's wife, Janet Porch, had laboriously – and I mean laboriously – traced out and digitised the white horse. Why reinvent the wheel when a Wild West horse was already done for you?"

Along with John and Janet, the game also gives a graphics credit to Nicole Baikalof. He explains: "After I had done the shootout scenes I asked if they could employ a proper artist as I had enough work to do with coding, and I wasn't much good with graphics anyway. So we interviewed and employed Nicole and she did all the remaining graphics. I feel we need to mention Epyx for the, shall we say, inspiration for Marshall McGraw. When he runs he looks incredibly like the main character from the Epyx game *Impossible Mission*. I say inspiration, because I mean, their character didn't wear a hat, did he?"

Smiling, John goes on to recall a humorous moment during the game's development. "At one point I was doing some work at home. My wife Glenys drove up and as she got out of the car she heard me scream. She thought I was being attacked and raced in to find



» The original *Kane* cover-art was saved from being thrown out by Mastertronic employee Anthony Guter.

me digitising the scream for Marshall McGraw getting shot! The same scream, played a lot faster, is used when the ducks get hit by an arrow. You get good at saving memory when squeezing a game into 64Kb."

Cramming everything into memory was the main technical challenge, yet the development only lasted three months and was largely without incident. That changed when Software Projects came to publish the finished



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

JET SET WILLY II (PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: C64
YEAR: 1985

DRAGON'S LAIR
SYSTEM: C64
YEAR: 1986

STAR PAWS
SYSTEM: C64
YEAR: 1987



» [Spectrum] Looks like McGraw has been sampling some of those special mushrooms that grow out back.

> Kane made tens of thousands of pounds. No-one anticipated the sheer volume of sales it would achieve

game. "Software Projects didn't feel the game would sell as a full price product, and who knows, it may not have."

Rather than publish the game itself, the firm looked to the company that had kickstarted the budget game boom. "They sold it to Mastertronic under a royalty scheme. I wasn't privy to the deal, but the game belonged to Software Projects and all royalties went to them. I understand *Kane* made tens of thousands of pounds for Software Projects. No-one anticipated the sheer volume of sales it would achieve."

Released for the Commodore 64 in early 1986, with conversions to the Spectrum, Amstrad CPC, C16 and BBC/Electron following (all without John's direct involvement), *Kane* shifted more than 250,000 copies in total. It was a huge hit, becoming Mastertronic's seventh highest-selling original game. "I was excited and flabbergasted," says John. "I went to the Computer Show in Earl's Court and *Kane* was number one on the Amstrad CPC while *Dragon's Lair* – which I adapted from the arcade version – was number one on the C64. My 15 minutes of fame: fan mail, magazines wanting to interview me."

Yet within a year, John would taste the less sweet side of the software industry. Following his work on the *Dragon's Lair* games and the original C64 title *Star Paws* (which was based on Matthew Smith's unfinished Spectrum game *Mutant Zombie Flesh-Eating Chickens*), that big foot that famously signalled the end of Miner Willy's adventures would firmly plant itself on Software Projects. It was game over for the publisher. "The money ran out in 1987 and all the programmers and artists were made redundant. They never could get Matthew Smith to write a follow up to *Jet Set Willy*," he muses.

Undeterred, he set up on his own and began to consider a follow-up to his smash hit *Kane*. "I did the C64 conversion of *Match Day 2* for Ocean Software and from that I had enough

CLASSIC COWBOY CAPERS

There ain't no room for the bad or the ugly in this here list

GUN FIGHT

Developer: Taito
Year: 1975

This influential arcade hit from Taito is the like the *Stagecoach* of videogame Westerns. Two cowboys face off against each other, pinging shots back and forth until one of them bites the dust. The graphics are beyond basic but the frantic gameplay still holds up to this day.





HIGH NOON

Developer: Ocean
Year: 1985

Rarely has shooting rowdy types been so enjoyable. As sheriff, you move around a static screen popping outlaws and making lots of work for the local undertaker (the little guy in black deserved his own spin-off title). A fun C64 game that manages to be both charming and challenging.

LAW OF THE WEST

Developer: Accolade
Year: 1985

A refreshing change of pace. Some sharp shooting is involved, but this C64 game is more about quizzing (or rather provoking) the town's barmy, brilliantly funny inhabitants. Best played under emulation to avoid the lengthy loading times.





GUNFRIGHT

Developer: Ultimate
Year: 1985

Widely regarded as the last great Ultimate game, *Gunfright* takes the Filmation II engine first seen in *Nightshade* and builds a proper game around it. You run around town, cornering outlaws and challenging them in tense shootouts.

MAD DOG MCCREE

Developer: American Laser Games
Year: 1990

It's that light-gun game you remember from the arcades. With terrible actors and hackneyed situations, it's so ridiculous you can't help but enjoy it. Playing it for larks in the arcade was acceptable, buying a home version was not.





RED DEAD REDEMPTION

Developer: Rockstar San Diego/ Rockstar North
Year: 2010

Rockstar's cowboy epic is often described as *GTA* on horses. It's so much more. Epic in scope and featuring one of Rockstar's best-written characters, it's a love letter to cowboy movies.



» [C64] Horse-riding returns in the sequel, and it's as unforgiving as ever. This happens a lot.

money to produce *Kane 2*. I approached the guys at Mastertronic who thought it was a great idea. They persuaded the boss of Software Projects to release the copyright and thus I could earn some money. From memory, I think I got £3,500 up front and a very small royalty."

Kane 2 followed the original's successful blueprint – four scenes featuring shooting and horse riding, with a little extra polish applied here and there. "Since the existing game was so popular I simply re-used most of the code," explains John. "It was really 'extra and better levels' rather than a sequel. But hey, what do you want for £1.99?"

Released for the C64 in 1988, *Kane 2* was very similar to its predecessor yet few could argue that it wasn't worth the retail price. Unfortunately for John, the game sold a fraction of what the original achieved and was not ported to any other machine. "By then everyone was buying 16-bit machines," he says. "It was too late to capitalise on the enormous popularity of the original *Kane*."

Ironically, it may have been the success of Mastertronic and the other budget labels that hastened the shift to the next generation of computers. You could argue that the 8-bit market was devalued by the influx of cheap software. John has mixed feelings about Mastertronic.

"Adding in a discounter like Mastertronic meant more publishers were going to get a smaller slice of the consumer pie and some fell by the wayside," he says. "Great games are produced by people with passion and I never felt Mastertronic were passionate about what it sold. But clearly they filled a niche in the market. In the end, it doesn't matter what anyone feels about Mastertronic as there will always be people who move boxes without any real interest in the content of the boxes. That's how I saw Mastertronic, it was about moving lots of boxes. Yet without the Mastertronic business model then *Kane* would never have sold the way it did."

Following the release of *Kane 2*, John's life changed in more ways than one. First, he relocated to the other side of the world to work for an Australian developer. "I came to Australia to work for Micro Forté and started my own design for a fun, Aussie-flavoured game for the Amiga and Atari ST that poked fun at Kylie Minogue, *Neighbours*, and so on. It would have worked, but they too ran out of money."

John and his wife remained in Australia, but he decided to sacrifice game development for an altogether different calling. "My pursuit of Jesus led me to eventually leave computing and serve God full time," he reveals. "I now pastor a small church in Canberra. It's actually far more fulfilling."

Even though he's left his programming life behind, he still has fond memories of his days making games, particularly among the creative 'family' at Software Projects. "At Software Projects I had other programmers around me, I had artists, and we were abreast of the new gaming trends. On my own I never had the confidence or money to employ others. Creativity gets stifled when you are worrying about paying bills, sorting disagreements between employees and so. Without the synergy of others around me, I never recovered the fun and freedom to create the way I did at Software Projects."

Since the existing game was so popular I simply re-used most of the code

'TRONIC TRADING

Digging up software sales data can be a headache – many 8/16-bit publishers are no longer around and of those that are, most no longer have historic data to hand. Mastertronic is one of the exceptions. Anthony Guter worked for the company between 1985 and 1991, initially as finance controller, and he kept a record of every game's sales. Looking at the document we can see how sales of *Kane* were broken down across the different formats:

COMMODORE 64	83,922
AMSTRAD CPC	55,863
ZX SPECTRUM	50,185
COMMODORE 16	47,420
BBC/ELECTRON	25,439
TOTAL SALES	262,829

Proving that it often paid to support the less popular machines, Mastertronic's single best-selling title was not a Commodore 64 or Spectrum game, but actually the Commodore 16 version of *Formula 1 Simulator* with sales of 173,498.

It was possible to wring lots of cash from former full-price hits if you were clever. The budget re-releases of Activision's *Ghostbusters* and Digital Integration's *Speed King* shifted 449,835 and 304,923 copies respectively.

Mastertronic sold more than 20 million games across all formats between 1983 and 1991.

And of the games he created, he still feels that the original *Kane* is his most successful. "*Kane* was wonderful," he says. "It was my first opportunity to express my idea of fun once I had mastered the C64 hardware. *Star Paws* was my favourite game, but it wasn't the simple fun that *Kane* somehow encapsulated. Even to this day I meet people who exclaim 'I loved that game when I was a kid!' The simple joy of the entire 8-bit era has been re-created with some of the recent smartphone games. There was, and I think there always will be, a huge market for entertaining and simple-to-understand games."



» [C64] Sensitive types look away now. McGraw makes peace with the Indians by shooting migrating ducks with his bow and arrow.

iOS Gems

As Apple prepares to launch a new iPad and iPhone, we take a look at some of the best conversions of classic games that have been lovingly restored on iOS



THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

Price: £1.99 (£2.99 iPad) **Developer:** LucasArts



It was a toss-up between this and the excellent conversion of *Broken Sword*, but *Monkey Island* just clinched it for us. While we're not huge fans of the new visuals, the voice acting is a welcome addition, enhancing the incredibly funny script. The controls are also very good, while there's an excellent option that enables you to play the original PC version of the game by simply swiping your fingers across the screen. Lovely.



SONIC CD

Price: £2.99 **Developer:** Sonic Team



Sonic's not had the best of starts on iOS, but his *Mega CD* outing is absolutely superb, proving that Sonic's adventures can translate perfectly well. The controls are extremely responsive, ensuring you never miss a single jump, while it suffers from none of the frame-rate issues that plagued *Sonic 4* on iOS. It also helps that it's a truly fantastic *Sonic* game – it's our favourite after part two – with extremely clever level design, great-looking visuals and fantastic music.



FINAL FANTASY III

Price: £10.99 (iPad £11.99) **Developer:** Matrix Software



While *Final Fantasy I* and *Final Fantasy II* are also available on iOS, this slick offering is simply a better game. A conversion of the DS game, which itself was an adaptation of the NES original, *Final Fantasy III* is an excellent port that benefits from superb touch controls, which really enable you to get stuck into the lengthy and engaging adventure. It looks superb as well, losing very little in the translation from DS to iOS. It's certainly pricey, but totally worth it.





PINBALL ARCADE

Price: Free (in-app purchases) **Developer:** Farsight Studios



Once upon a time, Game Room promised all the excitement of a virtual arcade but never truly delivered. Farsight Studios is attempting the same thing for pinball, and so far, it's a resounding success. Downloading the free app gets you *Tales Of The Arabian Nights*, and you can then purchase extra tables separately or in packs for a discounted rate. There are currently ten tables available, with more on the way. Superb physics and online leaderboards make *Pinball Arcade* a pinball junkie's dream.



DRIVER

Price: £1.99 **Developer:** Gameloft

Gameloft's slick conversion of *Driver* is absolutely cracking. There are certainly a few concessions when it comes to the controls, but they still work surprisingly well on iOS, far better than the likes of *GTA III* (which itself is pretty decent). The opening garage level has also been made easier, allowing you to enjoy the fun, structured nature of the different missions, while voice acting has been added to cut-scenes. An extremely impressive port of a highly enjoyable game.



CHU CHU ROCKET

Price: £2.99 (£1.99 iPhone) **Developer:** Sega Of America

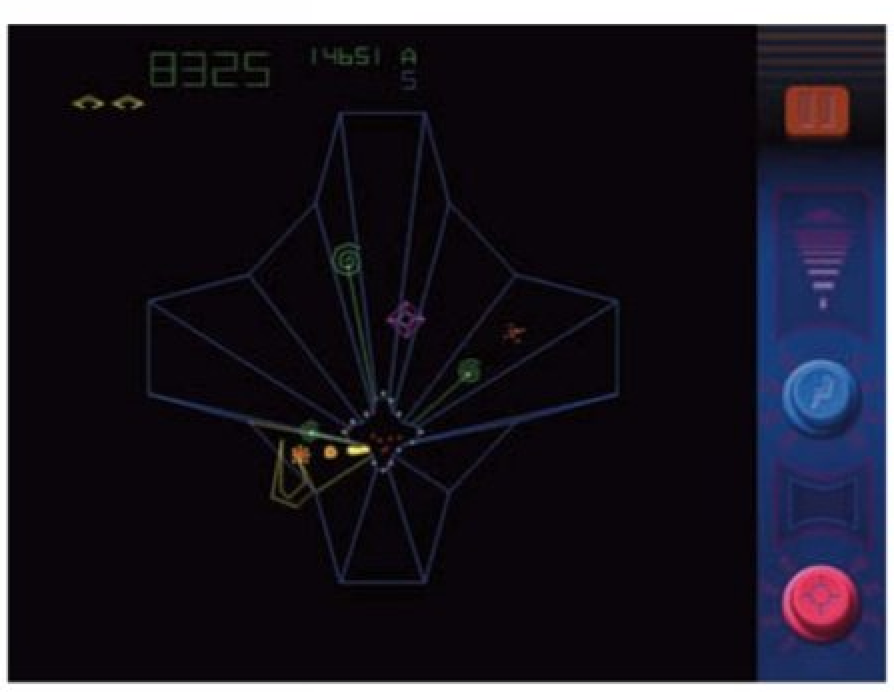
Sega's amazing Dreamcast puzzler is perfectly suited to iPad. It's ideal for short bursts of play, has amazingly simple controls (just swipe a direction on the square you want to use) and has a huge amount of clever puzzles. Guiding mice to rockets while avoiding hungry cats remains as entertaining now as it was in 1999, and it remains highly entertaining. It will also last an age thanks to the tough-as-nails challenge mode and the excellent multiplayer option that's been included.



ESPGALUDA II

Price: £3.99 (£7.49 iPad) **Developer:** Cave

There are a wealth of great shoot-'em-ups available on iOS, with many of the best arcade ports by Cave. *Espgaluda II* is no different, being an excellent conversion of its 2005 shooter. While it doesn't include all the arranged modes found on the Xbox 360 outing, it does include a brand new exclusive iOS mode that makes the most of machine's touch screen. An unmissable shooter.



TEMPEST

Price: £0.69 (in-app purchase) **Developer:** Code Mystics

Tempest is another classic game that has translated surprisingly well to its new iOS home. Like the *Elite Collection*, it's iCade compatible, but developers Code Mystics have included an impressive amount of controls, which allow you to simply concentrate on the frantic gameplay. It remains as fast and furious to play now as it did in 1981; while the vector-based graphics looks superb on the iPad's screen. If they had the luminescent glow of the original game it would be pretty much perfect.



MANIC MINER

Price: £0.69 (in-app purchase) **Developer:** Elite Systems

Manic Miner is available through Elite's *Elite Collection* (which costs £1.99 on iPhone) as an in-app purchase. Many older games don't work too well with touch screen controls, but *Manic Miner* is one of those rare exceptions. The original game only required three inputs – left, right and jump – which are easily handled in this superb conversion. Of course, all the Elite games are compatible with iCade, but *Manic Miner* is an excellent consideration for those who don't own it.



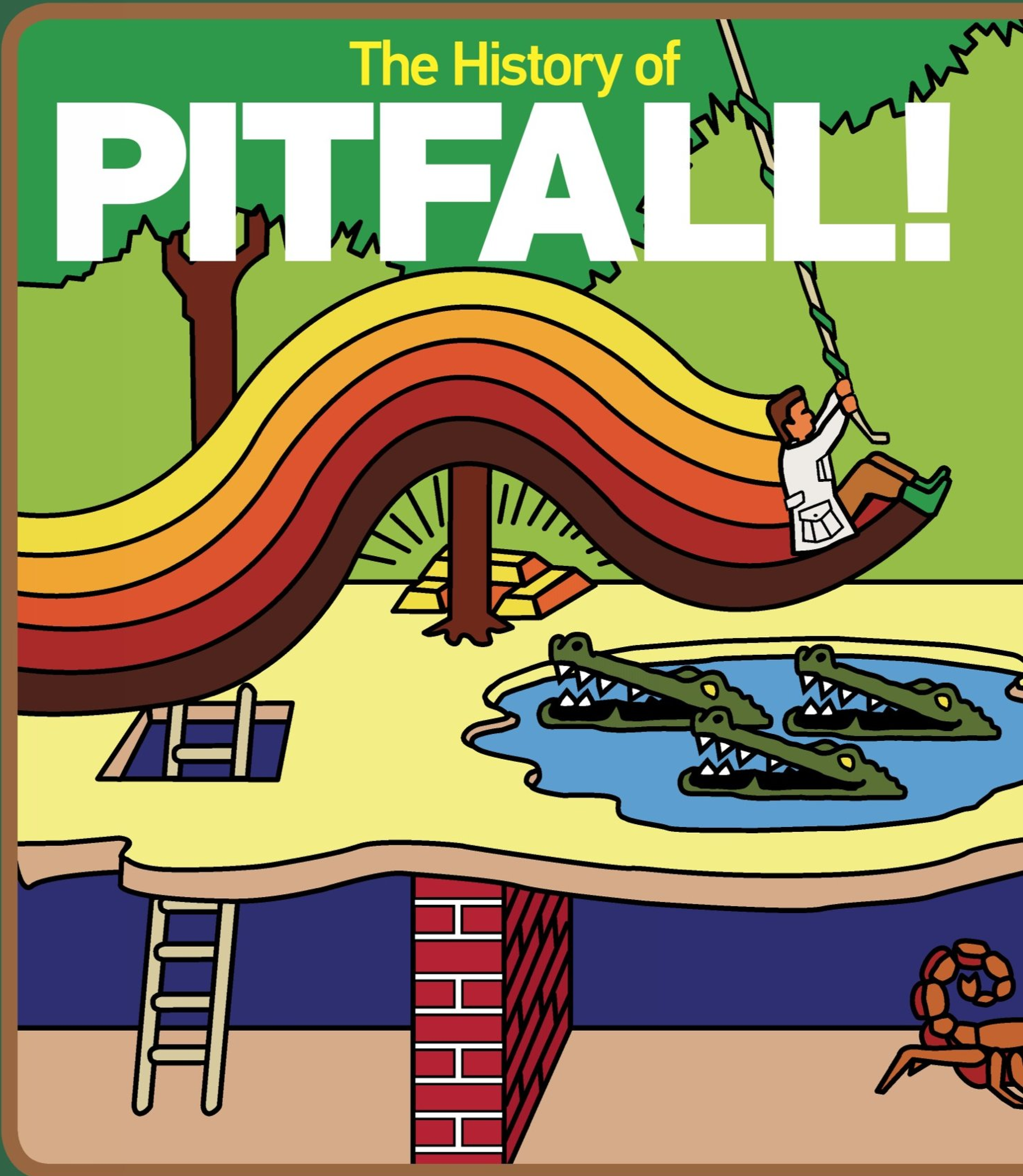
MS PAC-MAN

Price: £2.99 (£2.99 iPad) **Developer:** Namco Bandai

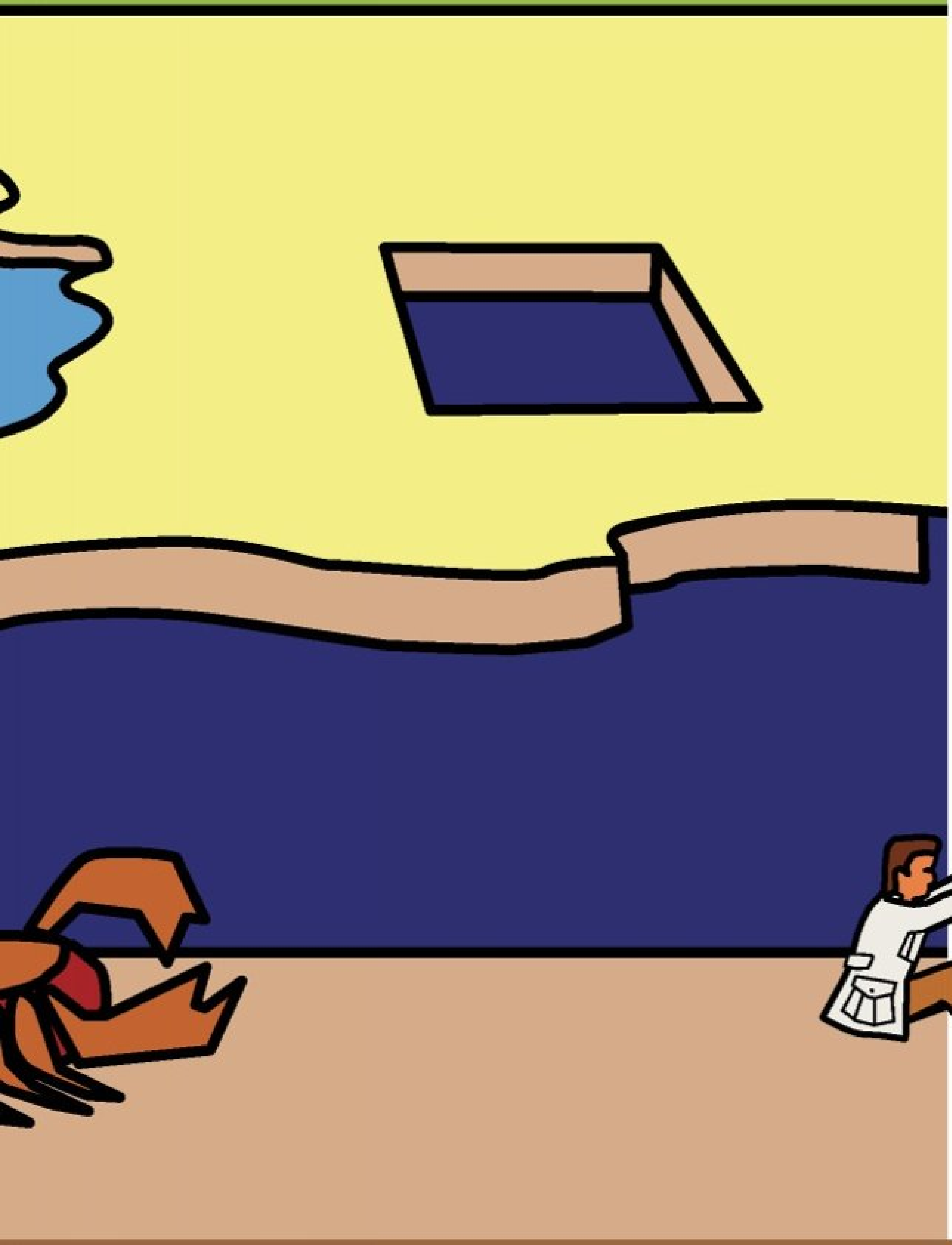
Pac-Man is also available on iOS, but we think its sequel is far better. It's the simplicity of the *Pac-Man* games that we love, and this works so well on iOS devices. There are three control types, including accelerometer, but we found swiping the screen to be the best way of getting around the cleverly-designed mazes. If you want a hectic, newer variation we recommend *Pac-Man Championship.*

The History of

PITFALL!



Forget Nathan Drake and Lara Croft, gaming's first true adventurer swung onto our screens 30 years ago this year. To celebrate the release of Pitfall Harry's recent iOS adventure, Stuart Hunt speaks to David Crane about the life and escapades of Activision's iconic adventurer



The videogame character serves as a tidy barometer to show how far videogame visuals have come. With their looks and designs dictated by technology, early characters were simple abstract shapes, requiring a bit of imagination to fully bring them to life. But as technology moved forward, so developers started to think more ambitiously about their creations.

It was around the mid-Seventies that the earliest human-looking characters started to appear and predictably debut in arcade sports titles. 1974 saw the release of *Baseball* by Ramtek Corporation, *Basketball* by Taito, *Ball Park* (another baseball game) and *TV Basketball* by Midway.

The following year they began appearing in games away from sport. 1975 saw the release of Atari's infamous unlicensed *Jaws*-inspired arcade game *Shark Jaws*, in which players helped a harassed diver catch fish while avoiding the jaws of a great white shark, and Taito's *Western Gun* (*Gun Fight* outside of Japan), a Wild West versus shooter that played like a flipped version of *Pong* (you have to avoid getting hit) and is notable for being the first videogame to depict human-on-human violence.

Perhaps the next significant step to happen in this evolutionary chart was taken by Mattel, with its Intellivision 'running man' character. Used as a mascot for its console, the running man appeared in many of the machine's sports titles and was impressive with his realistic movements.





» [Atari 2600] The original *Pitfall!* was a massive success for Activision, spawning numerous sequels and an animated show.

But it was in 1979, the same year the Intellivision was being test-marketed in North America, that Activision co-founder David Crane finished creating a realistic-looking running man of his own, one that would take one giant leap for virtual mankind. There was a problem, though. David was struggling to come up with a compelling game to cast him in. After all, if you create a racing car or a spaceship then the possible game scenarios practically write themselves. Create a human character however, and the possibilities become pretty much limitless.

"The closest I came was a *Cops And Robbers* game, which was never published," recalls David. "I used an alternating black and white, horizontal stripe colour scheme on the character to create a running convict (the same scheme I slipped into Larry Kaplan's *Kaboom!* for the mad bomber). I made a side-view screen-to-screen cityscape that was actually the technical predecessor to *Pitfall!*'s jungle. But I wasn't excited about the gameplay, and when I was inspired to make *Freeway* I put the little guy on the shelf. After *Freeway* I brought the guy back out, but got



DAVID ON...

Why Harry is called Harry

"The name Harry meant nothing other than the fact that it rolled off the tongue nicely. And he wasn't officially named Harry during development, it was just his nickname and it stuck."



» [Atari 2600] We'll never forget the first time we swung on a rope in *Pitfall!* It's become a hallmark of the series ever since and still works extremely well as a gameplay mechanic.



intrigued by the technical challenge of making large racing cars on the 2600, and *Grand Prix* was born. Only after that did I decide to stick with the little running man until I had a great game to put him in."

It was then that David sat down with a blank piece of paper and began sketching out a rough outline for the game concept that ultimately became *Pitfall!*. He began by drawing his little running man, and then, struck with the idea of a jungle surrounding, added in some trees. A few minutes later and David had a concept that he was finally satisfied with. Of course the next – and hardest – challenge was getting it all into the Atari 2600.

"The hardware limitations of the Atari 2600 dictated everything. Every frame of Harry's animation had to fit in an 8 pixel wide by 16 half-pixel tall space," explains David. "If I got tricky, I could change the colour of each row of pixels, but no two pixels in the same row



» [NES] The worst it got for Harry. *Super Pitfall* is anything but its adjective, suffering from shonky gameplay and rubbish visuals.

could be different colours. The ROM was very limited, and each animation required many animation frames. So if Harry had to run, jump, climb, and swing, he could take up a significant portion of the available ROM. "But none of those problems were the worst. After creating a smoothly-animated human figure for the first time in a videogame, I had to then make a compelling game. The main character used up a significant portion of the Atari 2600's display capability, so the question I had to answer was 'How do I make a game with what is left?'"

Though the jungle concept took David minutes to think up (if you discount the time spent thinking up those unused scenarios), the programming side of *Pitfall!* was anything but quick, clocking in at an astonishing 1000 hours. David explains that elements of *Pitfall!* took inspiration from three main sources. The vine swinging was naturally inspired by Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan*. The crocodile sections were from a sequence in the US cartoon *Heckle And Jeckle* that saw its two magpie characters running across the heads of alligators, and the biggie was *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*, which was showing in theatres at the time and generating a buzz. As well as Indy's first adventure, 1981 also marked the release of *Donkey Kong* in North America. A landmark arcade game starring a running man in a scenario that aped a popular movie, it was hugely successful and put both Nintendo and the platformer on the map.

"I was single and living in a large apartment complex that had a small arcade in the



» With *Pitfall!* being such an important game for Activision at the time, it was heavily advertised in numerous magazines.

DAVID ON...

Harry becoming a company mascot for Activision

"I never thought of making him the company mascot (although Nintendo did quite nicely doing that with Mario). And after just one sequel I was happy to move on to other ideas."

EVOLUTIONARY SCALE

We chart the evolution of human characters in videogames

1974 **BASEBALL** · 1975 **GUN FIGHT** · 1979 **INTELLIVISION 'RUNNING MAN'** · 1981 **DONKEY KONG** · 1982 **PITFALL!** · 1989 **PRINCE OF PERSIA** · 1992 **FLASHBACK** · 1996 **TOMB RAIDER** · 2007 **UNCHARTED: DRAKE'S FORTUNE**

recreation building," David remembers when we ask him about his impressions of seeing *Donkey Kong* for the first time. "I played the arcade games and pinball machines many hours every week. I was well into the design of *Pitfall!* when *Donkey Kong* arrived, and as with any new addition to the arcade I played it to the exclusion of all else until I had it mastered. I didn't draw any parallels to *Pitfall!* at the time. As I have said, I considered it inevitable that human characters would end up in games; and arcade games had the computing power to do it. I already had paths and ladders in *Pitfall!*'s design, so that seemed natural to me as well. The Atari 2600 limited me to horizontal bands of game play, and forced me to go screen-to-screen. So to put it simply, I enjoyed *Donkey Kong* for the game it was, but at the time comparing the two games was like comparing apples to oranges."

In 1982, *Pitfall!* was released and astonished 2600 owners. To them it wasn't just a game, but a virtual world to run, swing and explore in. And while it wasn't the first platform game, it did pioneer and popularise the flowing screen-to-screen style that would come to dominate the genre. So given its impact, how successful was it for Activision?

"*Pitfall!* earned Activision some $50 million… Not bad for a game that cost maybe $50,000 to make," answers David. "But to be fair there were a lot of marketing dollars spent there. When a game becomes a hit, companies spend on marketing to make it a mega-hit. While it is a mega-hit, marketing dollars are spent to keep it a mega-hit. One mega-hit can propel a company to stardom and help the business in every way."



» This advert for Pitfall II: Lost Caverns was designed to look like a movie poster, even going so far as to list all the characters in the games in the credits.

DAVID ON…

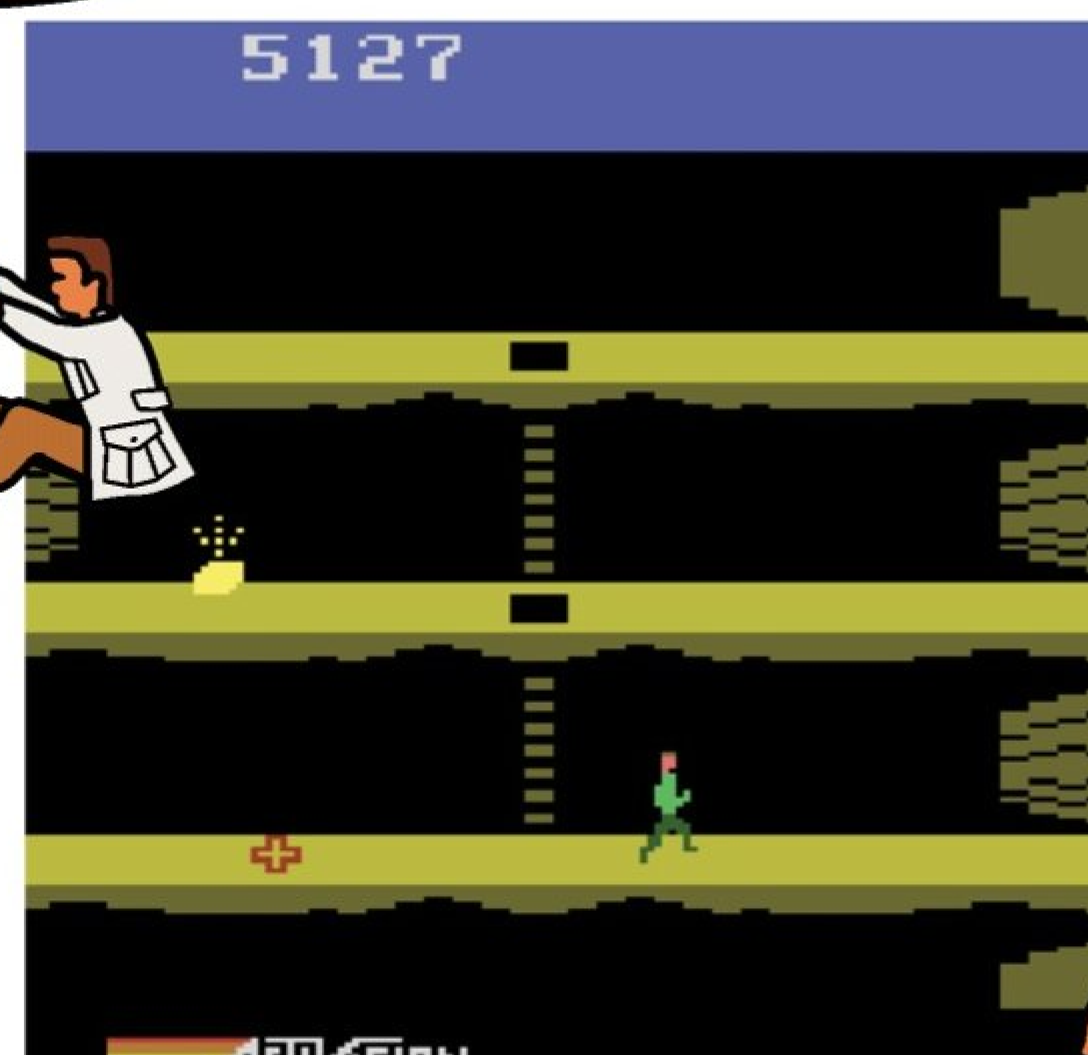
Pitfall! the motion picture

"I wasn't aware of any effort to make a *Pitfall!* film. Who knows, maybe the fact that it was made into a children's show first torpedoed any hope of a film for adults. Pitfall Harry happily stayed in the jungle."

Pitfall! was Activision's biggest ever release. It stayed at the top of the charts for many, many weeks, and the mechanising deals came flooding in. David remembers this hectic but exciting time well.

"Whole teams of people were merchandising *Pitfall!*. We had a board game, jigsaw puzzles and other licensed products. The merchandising people made a deal with Ruby Spears to produce a Saturday morning cartoon. They made a few episodes, and those aired as part of the *Supercade* with the *Pac-Man* cartoon and others. To be brutally honest, the stories were pretty bad, and the production quality low compared to what we see today. But I would still love to have prints of the original masters for my personal collection."

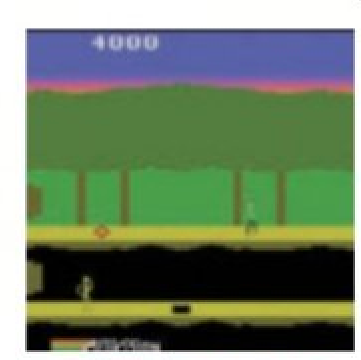
Pitfall! was also the most technically impressive 2600 game of its day too. And the belief it pushed the 2600 and its memory to its limits is supported by the development story of its 1984 sequel, *Pitfall II: Lost Caverns*. "I set out to make *Pitfall II* at a time when the Atari 2600 should have been replaced by a new gaming system," explains David. "But the old boy kept hanging on. I figured that if it was going to keep selling it needed a facelift. I designed a patented custom IC to go in the game cartridge that would expand the capabilities of the 2600 hardware. It gave the system more power and other neat features like the ability to play a full, orchestrated soundtrack. I used that chip to make *Pitfall II*. Sadly, the 2600 pretty much gave up the ghost after *Pitfall II* ran its course, and no other game was designed using that technology."



The chip inside *Pitfall II* made it one of the best-looking and sounding (it had a full music soundtrack) 2600 games ever. The visuals were a huge step up in quality, while the adventure was both larger and packed with imagination. It featured cameos from two characters from the *Pitfall Saturday Supercade* cartoon, new enemies and introduced balloon flying and swimming sections. Checkpoints were also added that would re-spawn Harry (he also now had unlimited lives) and the extra memory afforded by the chip allowed David to add a victory screen too, something he wanted to include in the original but didn't have the available space to do so.

Released towards the end of the 2600's commercial life, *Lost Caverns* was another big release for Activision, but it didn't sell as well as its predecessor. Considering the large install base of the 2600, and the fact David had proven that the machine still had plenty more to give (with a little helping push), we were curious as to whether Activision ever discussed making a third game to make a 2600 trilogy? It's a question that we're certain David gets asked more than any other by fans, but we're sure he won't mind humouring us this one time.

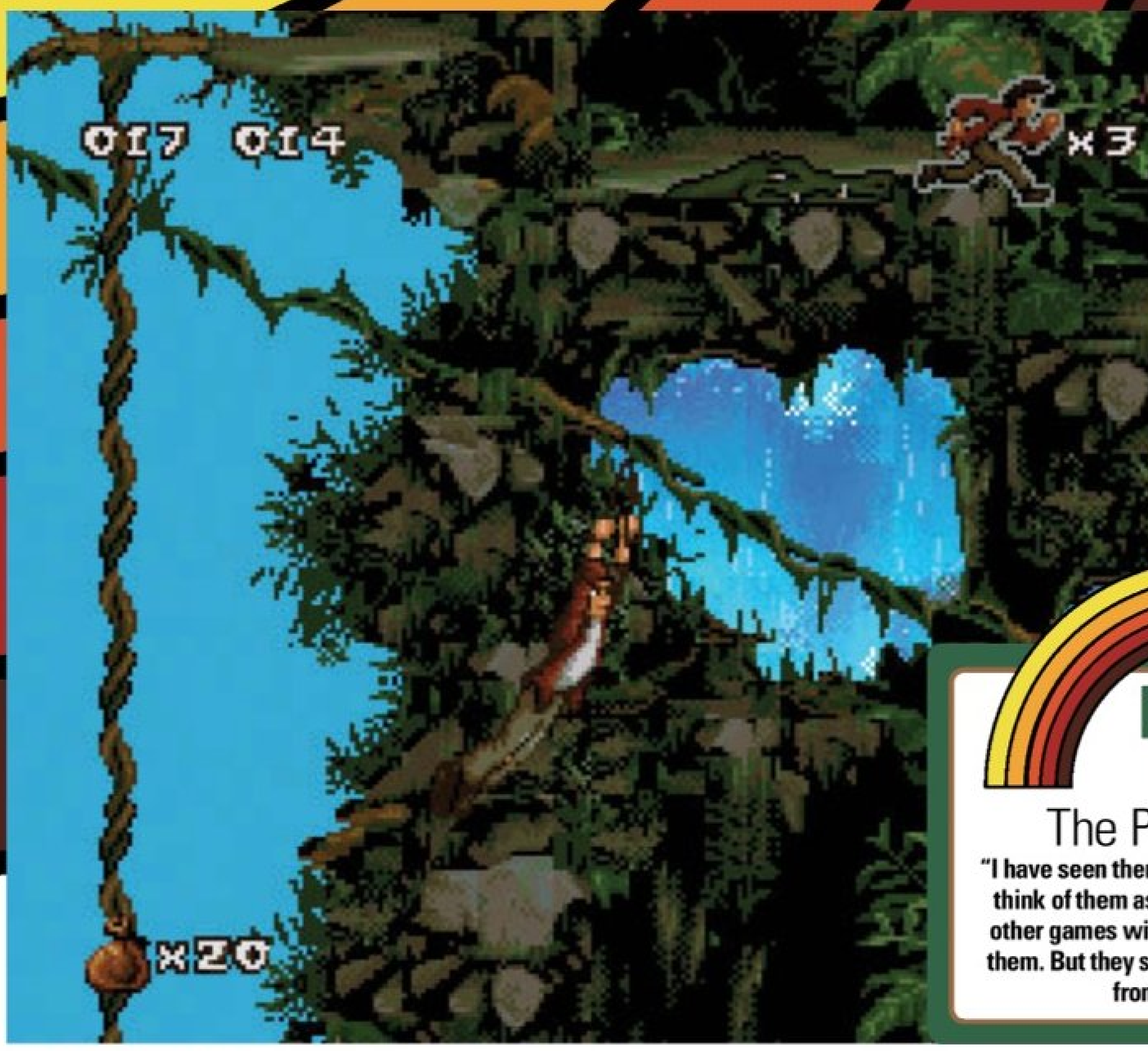
"I stayed at Activision until 1987. Many times the subject of *Pitfall III* came up, and



» [Atari 2600] *Pitfall II* built on the original in fine fashion. It had better graphics and more variety in its gameplay, including impressive swimming sections.



» [Arcade] Sega's *Pitfall II* arcade game is a neat *Pitfall* curio. It plays like *Pitfall!* but looks more like *Alex Kidd*.



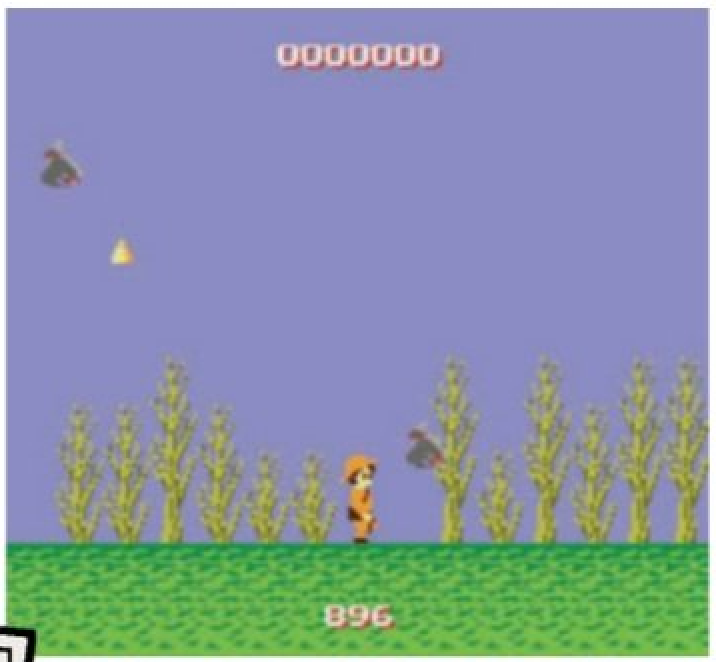
» [SNES] *The Mayan Adventure* saw Activision try to capitalise on the 16-bit platformer trend. It's a solid effort, and fairly popular in its day.



DAVID ON...

The Pitfall sequels

"I have seen them all, and played a few. I don't think of them as *Pitfall!* sequels as much as other games with the name *Pitfall* placed on them. But they sure engender strong feelings from game players."



» [NES] Activision did intend to release a sequel to *Super Pitfall*. It was to be heavily based around the Sunsoft game *Atlantis No Nazo*, which was also a bit rubbish.



» [Atari 2600] Snakes are just one of the many hazards that Harry must avoid. They have appeared in numerous sequels.

I was actually beginning to warm up to the idea around the time that there was a management change at the company. At that point I decided that it was no longer a company where I wanted to work. And since Activision owns the *Pitfall!* property, it wasn't going to be very likely that I would make another sequel. As you know, the retro gaming community continue to bring it up every year as well. I won't be doing *Pitfall III* on the Atari 2600. But I have still never said never on doing another 2600 game one day."

Though Harry never graced the 2600 again, his adventures continued. Following the release of *Pitfall II*, Sega licensed the property from Activision and used it to create an arcade game based on *Pitfall II*. Titled *Pitfall II: The Lost Caverns*, it featured levels loosely based on both 2600 games, plus some new ones. Running on Sega's System 1 arcade hardware (which generated *Wonder Boy* and *Flicky*) the graphics were rendered in that bright and colourful Eighties Sega look, and in addition to overhauled stages and graphics, new dangers were also added, including lightning bolts, fireballs and even killer tomatoes.

A loose port of *Pitfall II: Lost Caverns* also found its way to NES, this one with the dubious moniker *Super Pitfall*. Published by Activision and developed by Japanese company Micronics, *Super Pitfall* is derided by most fans of the series. It suffers from poor collision detection, flickering sprites, stilted animation, and frustrating trial and error gameplay – chiefly a result of items required to complete the game only becoming visible to the player when Harry jumps in the vicinity of their hidden trigger spots. To make matters worse, Harry was also given a gun that proved useless against most enemies (bullets pass over their heads), and was redrawn to look like Mario in a safari hat. Possibly too embarrassed to show his face after this disappointing effort, several years passed before he would appear on our screens again. Thankfully though, his next adventure was a marked improvement.

With the 16-bit era firmly upon us and the likes of *Super Mario World* and *Sonic The Hedgehog* continuing the popularity of platform games, Activision decided the time was right to reboot *Pitfall* for a new generation of gamers. *Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure*, which Activision developed in conjunction with Redline Games, cast players in the role of Harry's son and saw him embark on a mission to rescue his father after he mysteriously goes missing during a quest.

The Mayan Adventure was an action-heavy 2D platformer with levels that had little innovation or opportunity for exploration. It was rescued by some sumptuous visuals, a smattering of entertaining action set-piece moments and silky animation. It also featured an amusing victory screen with a brief cameo from Harry senior, who is depicted in all his 2600 glory. The original 2600 game was also tucked away as a neat bonus for fans to discover too.

As polygon graphics appeared and 3D platformers started trending, so Activision saw another opportunity to capitalise with *Pitfall*. Harry kicked off his 3D adventures

Mobile Pitfall!

We speak to Activision Mobile's Gordon Hall to find out how The Blast Furnace has revitalised the 2600 classic for iOS

We'll start with the obvious question. Why *Pitfall!* as your first game?
Activision has definitely got some fantastic back catalogue IP that we'd like to trawl through but the primary motivator behind us going for *Pitfall!* was because it's such an iconic game. When I was looking through the back catalogue, *Pitfall!* stuck out as one of the highlights. It was a massive seller back in the day, in 1982. It's the game's 30th anniversary this year.

How have you considered gaming nostalgia with the new version?
It's a fast frenetic game that we've put out, probably the fastest infinite runner going, but it stays true to the original. You've got the snakes and the scorpions, the crocodiles and the swinging vines but it's been reimagined for simple control mechanisms and really pushes that sense of pace. It seemed a perfect title to me because you could easily imagine it being remade in this way.

Can we expect to see more retro Activision games receive iOS updates?
I'm so reticent to name titles because people always assume you're going to do them but I can answer your question more vaguely to say which games bit me back in the day that I'd like to play on mobile. There's a couple that stand out straight away and that's the likes of *River Raid* and *Kaboom*, which use simple game mechanics that would work brilliantly on mobile.





» [PS2] *The Lost Expedition* pays a neat tribute to David Crane. It's a decent sequel, even if the graphics look a bit childish.

with *Pitfall 3D: Beyond The Jungle* on PlayStation. A third-person action game with light platforming elements, players reprised the role of Harry's son, who was now rendered in 3D and voiced by actor Bruce 'Ash Williams' Campbell. It was another polished outing but ultimately felt derivative for the iconic franchise, and coming in the wake of the likes of *Mario 64*, *Crash Bandicoot* and *Tomb Raider*, it struggled to get noticed against the competition.

The next release was *Pitfall: The Lost Expedition* in 2004, which originally appeared on PS2, GameCube, Xbox, PC and GBA, before receiving a rebadged Wii conversion titled *Pitfall: The Big Adventure* that featured enhance graphics and motion control functionality. Though we suspect most 2600-owning *Pitfall* fans were put off by its cartoonish *Spyro*-style aesthetics, it's actually surprisingly well made. It also has some nice humour too, with Harry portrayed as a kind of Indiana Jones meets Pepé Le Pew type. It also makes a few neat references to David, with the story explaining that Harry was fostered by a Dr. David Crane after his father left him to go off adventuring. The ending is also particularly poignant, as it shows Harry telling his love interest that he wishes to return back home to see David someday.

Though *Pitfall* is no longer the king of the swingers in the platformer market, it still resonates with gamers today. Activision has selected the franchise to spearhead its new mobile games studio, The Blast Furnace. Its debut iOS title transforms the 30-year-old game into an entertaining and surprisingly addictive endless runner (you can read our review on page 98) while still managing to look and feel connected to the roots of the original 1982 game.

We finish up our time with David by asking him how he feels about *Pitfall!* reaching 30, and being a big part of such an iconic series that still endures today.

"The beauty of *Pitfall!* was its accessibility. You didn't have to be a hardcore gamer to have fun playing the game, but if you were, you still got plenty of challenging entertainment. The key word is challenging. Rob Fulop used to say 'You want hard? How about a screen where a wizened old man sits up and says "I am thinking of a number between one and a million." That's hard.' What you have to come up with is gameplay that is challenging, without being hard." Big difference, and a tall order. *Pitfall!* was designed to lead a player through the game, only introducing new skills when the player was ready to attempt them. Thus challenges could be added without making the game too hard."

> **"I have never said never on doing another 2600 game"**



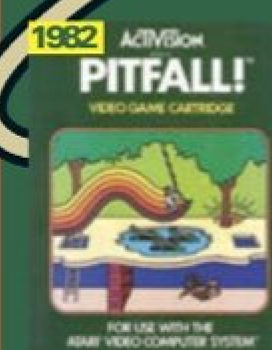
» David's next project is *Jungle Adventure*, a Kickstarter project that sees him returning to the jungle. Expect more details from us in the next issue.

30 YEARS OF PITFALLS

1982 to 2012

A complete rundown of every game in the series; from 1982 to 2012

1982



Pitfall!
Pitfall! was a landmark videogame, introducing a gaming icon, squeezing more than thought possible from the 2600, and putting Activision firmly on the map.

1983



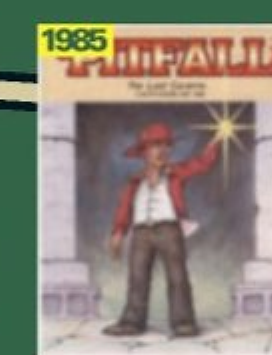
Pitfall II: Lost Caverns
The superb sequel was co-powered by a chip in its cart, allowing for improved visuals, sounds and ultimately a bigger and better game.

1984



Pitfall II: Lost Caverns 'Adventurer's Edition'
The Atari 8-bit and 5200 versions feature a bonus level upon completion. It's tougher than the original stage.

1985



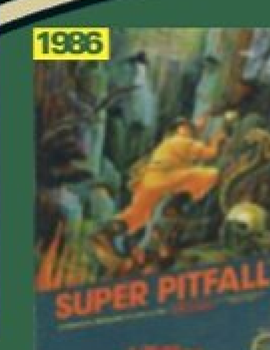
Pitfall II: The Lost Caverns
Sega licenced the property from Activision to produce this arcade game loosely based on the second game.

1985



Pitfall II
A home port of Sega's *Pitfall II* arcade game for the Sega Master System in Japan, it was released via My Card.

1986



Super Pitfall
Unpopular NES game with gameplay issues aplenty and a gun-wielding Harry that looks like Mario.

1994



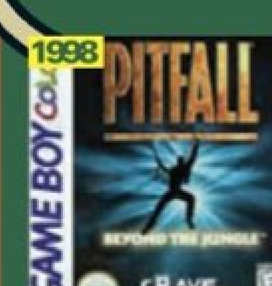
Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure
Harry makes the leap to 16-bit in this stunning-looking platformer. It's light on exploration but extremely polished.

1998



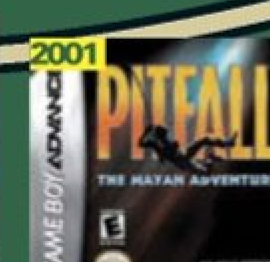
Pitfall 3D: Beyond The Jungle
Harry got remade in polygons for this third-person action adventure. Featuring the voice talent of Bruce Campbell.

1998



Pitfall: Beyond The Jungle
A loose 2D Game Boy Colour version of the 3D adventure. Typical side-scrolling platform fare, with good visuals.

2001



Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure GBA
A decent GBA port, visually it doesn't look as nice as the original, but the gameplay and levels are untouched.

2004



Pitfall: The Lost Expedition
A colourful cartoony *Pitfall* sequel aimed more towards younger audiences. Plays like *Crash Bandicoot*, *Spyro*, *Jak & Daxter* and the like.

2004



Pitfall: The Lost Expedition GBA
Another 2D reimagining of its 3D counterpart, *The Lost Expedition* keeps the colourful cartoon art style, story and tone of the main release.

2008



Pitfall: The Big Adventure
A Wii conversion of *The Lost Expedition* that features enhanced visuals, smoother animation and retrofits motion controls into the action.

2012



Pitfall!
The first title to come from Activision Mobile reinvents the original *Pitfall!* into a colourful and fast-paced infinite runner for iOS.



THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home





IN DEPTH

» *Mystic Warriors* runs from the same rooting-tooting hardware as *Sunset Riders*. The game even gets a plug in the first stage.

» The action is superb. Seconds later a truck smashed through these cars and smashed into a petrol station. Its dangerous driver is the first boss in the game.

» There are five different ninja warriors in the game. They don't differ that much, but this ninja here definitely has the hardest hair style.

MYSTIC WARRIORS

■ **Developer:** Konami ■ **Year:** 1993 ■ **Genre:** Run-and-gun

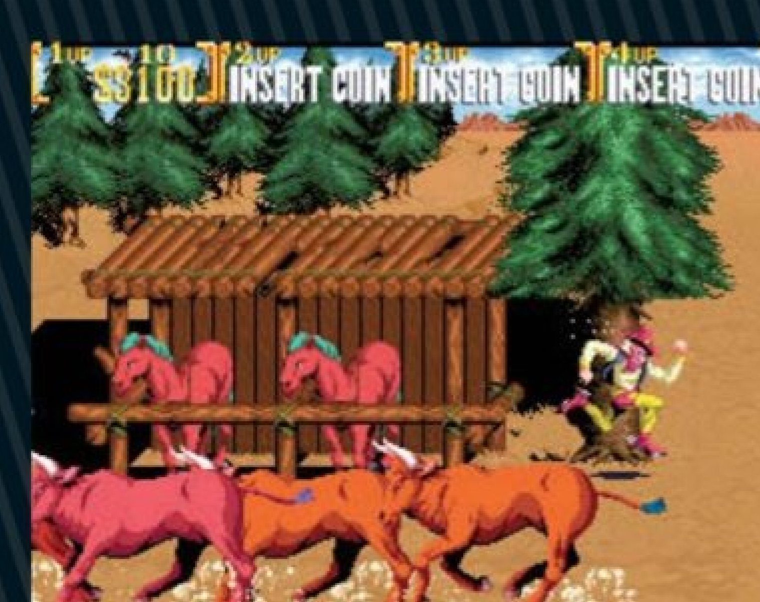
■ **For a neat slice of arcade run-and-gun action this month, look no further than *Mystic Warriors*. Essentially *Sunset Riders* dressed in shozoku (that's ninja clothing), it sees a team of five young ninja heroes take on a larger gang of evil goofball ninjas who are out to take over the world. Okay, so the story is about as original as black shoes, but *Mystic Warriors* charm lies in its presentation, quick-paced action and the variety found in its levels. It doesn't rewrite the run-and-gun rulebook; it merely underlines some of the best parts.**

The first thing that hits you about *Mystic Warriors* is the music. Kicking things off with a piece that sounds uncannily like the opening theme to *The Terminator*, you're given some mission exposition presented in typical arcade fashion: a staccato-reading 30-word plot that leaves players with the job of filling in the blanks, accompanied by images that introduce the protagonists and their enemies – who are, respectively, a band of ninjas who clearly dress in the dark, and the somewhat professional-sounding Skull Enterprise.

Mystic Warriors plays like a mixture of *Shinobi* and *Sunset Riders*, with the action primarily side-scrolling but enemies and bosses occasionally attacking from the top and bottom of the screen. There is very little difference between the five ninja characters in the game, save for their animations and weapons. All have the same attacks, pick-ups and power-ups. Their primary weapon is throwing stars, which can be upgraded to rapid and scatter fire but they also have a melee weapon they use automatically against enemies that get too close.

In terms of power-ups and pick-ups, things are kept quite simple. As well as being able to upgrade their weapons, the ninjas can come across smart bomb-style spells which activate the instant they pick them up (not so great if there are no enemies on-screen at the time), and a bubble that gives them temporary invincibility and you get a pretty good idea of what a Zorbing glam rock ninja would look like – it's a complete disappointment.

The imaginative enemies and level designs do impress though, and this is thanks to Konami packing some creative and satisfying set-pieces into the stages. *Mystic Warriors* is another polished run-and-gun game from one of the masters of the genre, and is our pick of the pile this month.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

SUNSET RIDERS 1991

Running from the same arcade hardware as *Mystic Warriors*, the games obviously play very similarly – just replace the gunslingers with shurikenslingers. *Sunset Riders* was ported both to the SNES and Mega Drive, so there's plenty to play it on.

COSMIC COP

■ **Developer:** Irem ■ **Year:** 1991 ■ **Genre:** Shooter



» [Arcade] Recognise the game, but not the name? Well *Cosmic Cop* was also known as *Armed Police Unit Gallop*. Stupid right?

■ **This *R-Type* sequel** stroke spin-off sees the Bydo war machine move from a claustrophobic H.R. Giger-style cosmos to a claustrophobic glum-looking post-apocalyptic city. You play a specialist police unit tasked with taking down a motorcade of Bydo creations. Piloting the R-11B Peace Keeper instead of the famous R-9A Arrowhead, the new ship is still capable of unleashing an impressive amount of firepower.

Its standard shot can be levelled up several notches, and is complemented by a secondary laser weapon that fires a concentrated stream of energy that whips around the screen and automatically locks onto enemies. There's also a third armament that can be picked up that fires ground-hugging missiles. Some levels also have obstacles that require quick firing to avoid, from deactivating sludge pumps to blasting a path through buildings, while *Cosmic Cop*'s scrolling is also unique in that it allows the player to manipulate its speed. Basically the further right of the screen the faster the player's ship goes. This becomes an essential part of play as most of the levels feature tight pathways and branching sections.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

POCKY & ROCKY 1992



Pocky & Rocky is a colourful and cartoonish shooter that leaves the spaceships behind. Released exclusively for the Super Nintendo, it's packed with imagination and variety, and still looks good today.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

R-TYPE 1987



Return to where it began with this timeless shooter that has lost none of its brilliance. Take your pick of home ports; we suggest taking the excellent Spectrum and PC-Engine ports for a spin.

ZIPPY BUG

■ **Developer:** Coreland ■ **Year:** 1986 ■ **Genre:** Shooter



» [Arcade] If you like to stare at trees all day long then you're going to seriously love *Zippy Bug*.

■ **This colourful shooter** sees a little dude scaling a tall tree to rescue his girl from a guy who looks a bit like *Tekken*'s Yoshimitsu. Climbing bark is the easy bit, especially as our hero is wearing some headgear that gives him the power of temporary flight, quickened reflexes and firing speed. The difficult part arises from the tree dwellers that appear in their droves to stop the rescue mission.

The enemies range from spiders and bugs, to things that look like human donuts, and you have to dodge their attacks while collecting the fruit and avoiding the deadly skulls they drop following their demise. And death comes quick and often as a result of enemy numbers and their testing attacks.

There were aspects of *Zippy Bug* we liked, but overall we found it too frustrating and repetitive to hold our attention. You can't exchange or power-up your weapon (though there is a mallet power-up you can find that kills everything on screen), there's little variation in the enemies you fight, and as everything takes place on a tall wide tree, the games get monotonous after a short while. It's not terrible, just terribly average.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

YAMOTO

■ **Developer:** Sega ■ **Year:** 1983 ■ **Genre:** Shooter

■ **This early Sega** shooter puts you in control of Yamoto. No, not brave husky Yamato from *Shadow Dancer* but the famous Japanese battleship which sank during 'Operation Ten-Go': a suicide attack against US Forces in the pacific theatre.

Okay, who we trying to kid here, we looked all this stuff up, but it still makes for interesting subject matter to base a videogame on, or so you'd think. Now whether that particular final mission is the one represented in this game is unclear, but what we can tell you is the ship is heavily outgunned.

With only the front of the ship visible, you have to move the strafing warship from left to right, shooting down enemy forces made up of battleships and aircraft using a double-ended crosshair. One fire button launches torpedoes to sink battleships while another springs the ship's guns into life and is better used for tacking down enemy missiles and aircraft.

And that's pretty much *Yamoto*. We unfortunately just found it a bit dull. Or maybe we're just letting our unreasonably strong pining for a *Shinobi* dog spin-off cloud our opinion of it.



DESERT • ISLAND • DISKS

Dennis Koble

What cherished games would you take to the island?

Dennis Koble went from black and white coin-ops at Atari to creating VCS magic at Imagic. He tells Paul Drury about avalanches, saving Atlantis and taking Sonic for a spin

"At Atari, we felt like we could do anything!" says Dennis Koble, with a hearty laugh. "We had a 'can do' attitude. I remember *Atari Music* making pretty patterns on your TV, getting into pinball and handhelds. Anything was possible!"

Dennis should know. He joined Atari in the mid-Seventies, just as the company was introducing a new-fangled bit of technology into its coin-ops. Whereas its previous hits, like *Pong* and *Tank*, had forged their gameplay from hardwired circuits, Atari now planned to use microprocessors in its next batch of releases. And that meant it needed programmers.

"I really wasn't looking for a job," confides Dennis, "but I was invited over by a friend who worked there, and what they were doing looked fascinating. It seemed a fun environment to work in and it was a pretty healthy salary increase, too. They'd just shipped *Breakout*, one of the last of their games all done in hardware, and at Atari, they encouraged you to play games a couple of hours a day. You'd always find me at a *Breakout* machine!"

It was the perfect opportunity for a man who feared he was in danger of becoming just another brick in the wall. Since graduating from the University of California at Berkeley with a degree in electrical engineering and computer science, Dennis had been employed at Applied Technology in Sunnyvale, California, as a Fortran programmer, working on defence projects. Four years in and, appropriately enough for someone born in a town called Eureka, he had an epiphany. "I suddenly thought, 'Oh my gosh, this is my life! I'm going to be working for another 30 years. I better do something with my life!'"

And so, on his first day at Atari in 1976, Dennis was handed a book on programming the 6502 processor, a pad of squared paper to design his own graphics, and a brief to produce a racing game. He was the fourth official 'programmer' to be hired by Atari and wasn't the only one to be assigned a racer. Dave Shepperd had been set to work on *Night Driver*, a 3D take on the genre licensed from a German company, while Dennis, assisted by Lyle Rains and technician Dan Van Elderen, began work on a top-down racer. *Sprint 2*, the '2' signifying the number of players that could race simultaneously rather than it being a sequel, was released in 1976 and began a long-running series for Atari, as well as spawning a genre that is still in rude health today. We assume Dennis must have been delighted to see his first project standing proud in the arcade.

"When it was finished, I was thoroughly sick of it," he laughs. "It's true of virtually all my games. You've been eating, breathing, sleeping a game, and it's not uncommon to end up dreaming about it. Once *Sprint 2* was released, I immediately put it out of my mind, and it wasn't until two years later, when I saw it in an arcade in Santa Cruz, I thought, 'Wow, I created that!' I played it and thought, 'That's pretty cool. Oh, that could be better…' It's like it was created by someone else."

It was a feeling particularly pertinent for Dennis' next coin-op, *Dominos*. The game involved directing an ever-increasing stack of tiles, avoiding collision with your own trail or that of your opponent. Hang on, Dennis. Did you invent *Snake*? "I wish I had," he sniggers, sheepishly. "That was a copy of *Blockade* by Gremlin. It was a really fun game and very popular and, as was common in those days, everyone had to jump on the bandwagon. We had an extremely tight deadline to be a competitor – it went from conception to production in 13 weeks, and that was unheard of back then."

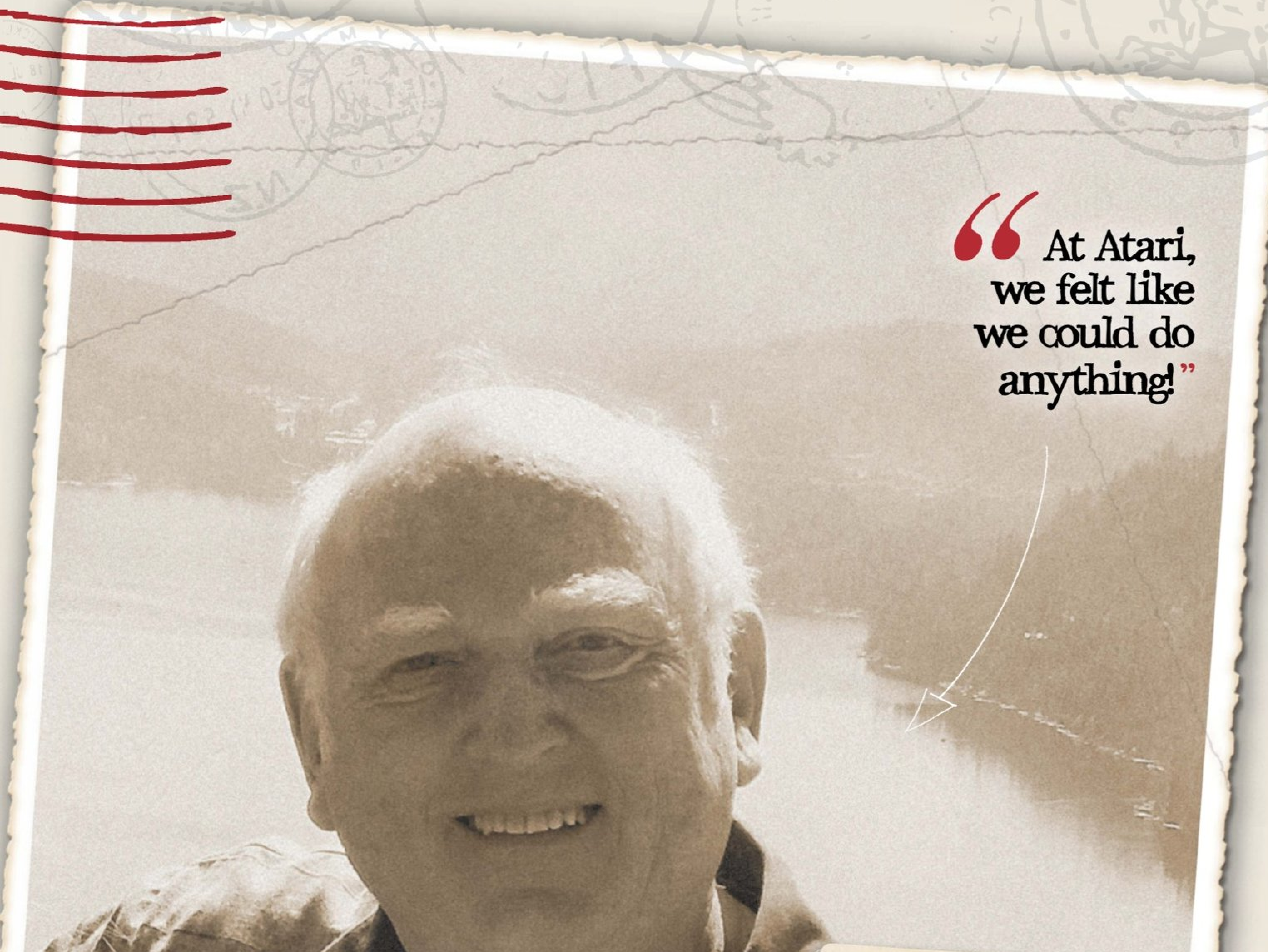
If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Dennis was to be on the receiving end for his next game. *Avalanche* tasked the player with catching an endless stream of boulders sent tumbling down the screen and, though a moderate success in the arcade, is perhaps best remembered for 'inspiring' Activision's VCS hit *Kaboom!*. It was to be Dennis' final arcade title, as having spent two and a half years in coin-op, he decided he needed a change and joined Atari's newly formed handheld division. "Steve Bristow [a VP at Atari] suggested we could print circuits on cardboard, which would make them much cheaper, and thus we could enter the

Trivia

Since retiring, Dennis has cultivated his love of dance music and created some banging house tunes of his own. Listen to his work at www.youtube.com/dkoble and have it large.



Dennis on the greens, taken from a PGA Tour Golf manual.



“At Atari, we felt like we could do anything!”

FIRST JOB
Dishwasher at a bakery

CURRENT JOB
Game designer at Innovative Leisure

FAVOURITE FILM
West Side Story

FAVOURITE ALBUM
Anything by Gareth Emery

FIRST COMPUTER/CONSOLE
Atari 400

FAVOURITE COMPUTER/CONSOLE
PC

BEST GAMING ACHIEVEMENT
My high-level characters in EverQuest II. I've been playing it for nine years.

BESTSELLING PRODUCT
PGA Tour Golf

BEST HOLIDAY
Quebec

WHO YOU WANT TO BE STRANDED WITH
Armin van Buuren. He could give me some DJing tips.

DESERT ISLAND DISKS

145235-46746546546546



SEX
M

NAME
Dennis Koble

DATE OF BIRTH
1948 – that's close enough!

PLACE OF BIRTH
Eureka, California

BIOGRAPHY
Dennis joined Atari coin-op in the mid-Seventies and produced several arcade hits before moving on to the VCS. He helped found Imagic, produced many arcade conversions for Tengen, and was instrumental in creating the hugely successful PGA Tour Golf series.

Timeline

1976 — 1979 — 1982 — 1984

SPRINT 2
■ **YEAR:** 1976
■ **FORMAT:** Coin-op
Dennis' first game for Atari kickstarted a long-running series and pioneered a whole racing genre. Were you a granny, rookie or pro driver?



AVALANCHE
■ **YEAR:** 1979
■ **FORMAT:** Coin-op
Dennis would later port this simple and addictive arcade title to Atari's home computers. *Kaboom!* owes it a considerable debt.



ATLANTIS
■ **YEAR:** 1982
■ **FORMAT:** VCS
Alongside his management role at Imagic, Dennis produced four VCS titles, including this innovative shoot-'em-up.

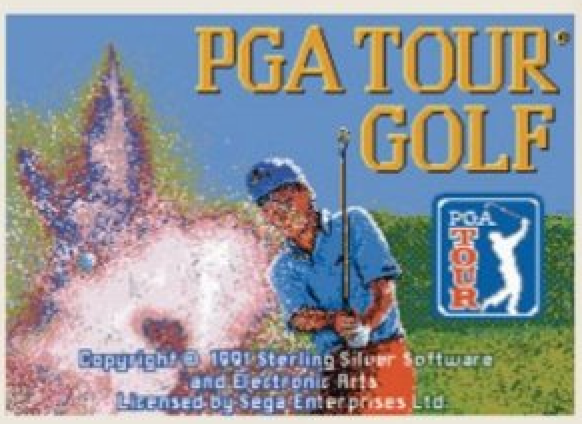


STOCKER
■ **YEAR:** 1984
■ **FORMAT:** Coin-op
Dennis' first project for Bally Sente revisited the overhead racing concept he'd pioneered with the *Sprint* series back in the Seventies.



The Team On Koble

Here's what **Retro Gamer** has to say about Dennis Koble's games…





Darran Jones
See this is why I enjoy articles like this. Being the ignoramus that I am, I wasn't really aware of Dennis' rich and diverse body of work. I'd linked him to the *PGA Tour Golf* games, but that was about it. Now, though, it turns out that I've played quite a few of his games over the years. The original *PGA* remains my favourite, however.





Paul Drury
From coin-ops, VCS games, console hits and arcade conversions to setting up and running his own videogame companies, Dennis really is a renaissance man of game development, trying his hand at every aspect of the business over the years. A charming, chatty chap who can knock out some cracking dance tunes, too!





Stuart Hunt
Like Darran, it simply has to be *PGA Tour Golf* for me. I sunk a huge amount of time into that game back in the day, and it still manages to play an excellent round of golf. I'm not too familiar with the rest of Dennis' output other than *Hard Drivin'*. I'm certainly going to be checking out *Xena: Warrior Princess*, though…



» [Arcade] Futuristic racer *Night Stocker* was so named to tie in with Seventies supernatural TV series *The Night Stalker*.

consumer handheld market," explains Dennis. "We did five prototypes, 12 inches by 12 inches with 10-20 LEDs on the playfield and a couple of buttons. There was a football one, a darts one that had an arc that swung back and forth, and a button press would launch a dart. We produced 2,000 of each game, but they never saw the light of day…"

Sadly, Atari decided the cardboard circuit board concept wasn't feasible and the division was closed, though not before releasing *Touch Me*, a portable version of an old Atari coin-op, which had already provided the inspiration for the hugely successful handheld *Simon*. Dennis had a similarly short flirtation with flippers during Atari's brief dalliance with pinball. He joined the division to collaborate with a young and inexperienced new recruit by the name of Eugene Jarvis. "You might have heard of him," winks Dennis, who helped Eugene, the man who would go on to create such classics as *Defender* and *Robotron*, with the programming on Atari's first table, *The Atarians*. "Pinball actually turned out to be a big challenge. The mechanical aspects of the solenoids, the flippers, the maintenance issues… The guys in Chicago had been doing it for decades!"

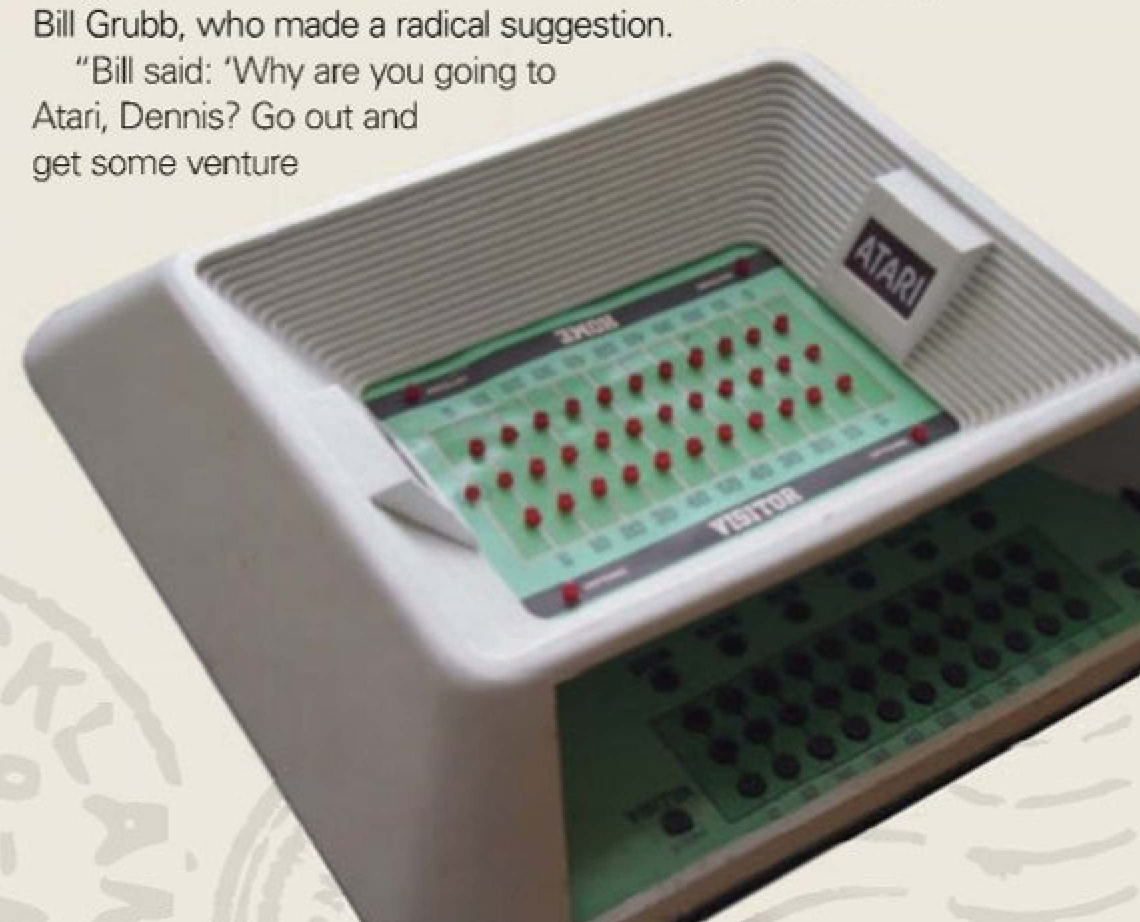
Atari, and by association Dennis, left the silver balls behind to concentrate on videogames. At the start of the Eighties, he took charge of the consumer division, which was soon split into separate departments for Atari's home computers and the VCS. He took charge of the latter and oversaw the phenomenal rise in the console's fortune. The huge income generated by million-selling cartridges meant the pressure to keep feeding the corporate beast was intense… and Dennis was sometimes the one to say dinner was cancelled. "Atari were very anxious to have the VCS version of *Asteroids* ready for Christmas 1980," he recalls. "I put my right-hand guy, Brad Stewart, on it, but I realised we'd been too ambitious. I was in Steve Bristow's office with about 15 managers and VPs, and we had Ray Kassar [head of Atari] on speakerphone. I had to tell him it wouldn't be ready and he was so angry. He was yelling at the top of his lungs! All these other guys looked terrified. Then I realised, the only two guys in the room whose jobs were safe were mine and Brad's – he couldn't sack us or he wouldn't have a game…"



> "Atari became a corporate behemoth, populated by suits at all levels"

It was a realisation not lost on other Atari VCS programmers. Just as Dennis had become head of the consumer division, four talented coders had left to set up Activision and enjoyed huge success as independent developers. As Dennis tired of "the corporate behemoth, populated by suits at all levels" that Atari had become, he started drawing up a business plan, proposing to management that he set up a small subsidiary of the company to develop games away from the rat race. He sought advice from a friend in Atari's marketing department, Bill Grubb, who made a radical suggestion.

"Bill said: 'Why are you going to Atari, Dennis? Go out and get some venture



1989

PGA TOUR GOLF
■ **YEAR:** 1989
■ **FORMAT:** PC
The series began on the PC, but it was the huge success of the console versions that kept Dennis working on annual updates for almost a decade.



1989

DON'T GO ALONE
■ **YEAR:** 1989
■ **FORMAT:** PC
This charming oddity produced for Accolade saw you guiding a diverse band of adventurers through a haunted house.



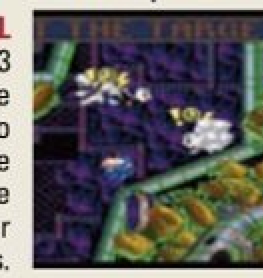
1991

PIT-FIGHTER
■ **YEAR:** 1991
■ **FORMAT:** Mega Drive
Dennis handled a number of technically challenging arcade conversions for Tengen, this fighter being one of the more successful.



1993

SONIC SPINBALL
■ **YEAR:** 1993
■ **FORMAT:** Mega Drive
This gruelling project had to be completed in an impossible time frame but proved to be a huge money-spinner for Dennis and Polygames.



» [Mega Drive] Dennis handled many demanding Mega Drive conversions, including *Hard Drivin'* and *Steel Talons*.





» [PC] The hugely successful *PGA Tour Golf* was the big break for Dennis' Polygames partnership with Lee Actor.



Sultans of Swing

Though Dennis headed up the VCS division, he maintained an interest in Atari's 400/800 computers, too.

"They were pretty nice machines but they hadn't got a lot of games," he recalls. "Some of us guys, including Chris Crawford, got together to form the Atari Program Exchange. The idea was to encourage programmers out there to submit their games. It was one of the first iTunes-type things! They'd send in their products; we'd publish them and send them royalties." To get the ball rolling, Dennis converted his old arcade title *Avalanche* and then went on to write two adventure games, using a game engine created by Larry Kaplan before he departed for Activision. "Everyone at Atari loved Scott Adams' games. I thought it'd be fun to try and write my own. I did *Chinese Puzzle*, which was like a minimal adventure, as clever and obtuse as possible, and then I did *Sultan's Palace*. Back then, any games featuring sex were forbidden. *Sultan's* was a fairly risqué title, with lots of plays on words."

If you enjoy double entendres and giving the sultan's daughter the sheiks, it's worth a shot…

funding!' My jaw dropped. I'd not considered that at all. It took us about two weeks to raise $2 million. Boom, there was the money! Imagic was off and running."

Other Atari employees also jumped ship, notably Rob Fulop, who would write Imagic's biggest seller, *Demon Attack*. Despite having considerable management responsibilities, Dennis kept his programming fingers busy, producing four original titles, including the solid shooter *Solar Storm* and the highly successful *Atlantis*, which had an intriguing thematic link with Fulop's *Cosmic Ark*. Imagic looked beyond the VCS, too, and developed for rival systems, such as the Intellivision and ColecoVision. It even ported two titles to Magnavox's Odyssey 2, becoming the only third-party developer to do so.

"I'll let you in on a little secret," whispers Dennis. "That was actually a clever move to avoid legal action. We knew Magnavox was going around suing every company, including Atari, for infringement of patents they held for controlling moving images on a screen. Everyone ended up paying them hundreds of thousands, sometimes millions, of dollars. We knew people at Magnavox and so we said we'd do some Magnavox games… and they didn't sue us! You scratch our back, we'll scratch yours!"

Through a combination of canny management, smart marketing – remember those distinctive, shiny cartridges? – and an impressive roster of hit games, Imagic's star was definitely rising. The business was all set to become a publicly listed company in late 1982, and thus make millionaires out of its founders, when Dennis' former employer made a rather inconvenient utterance.

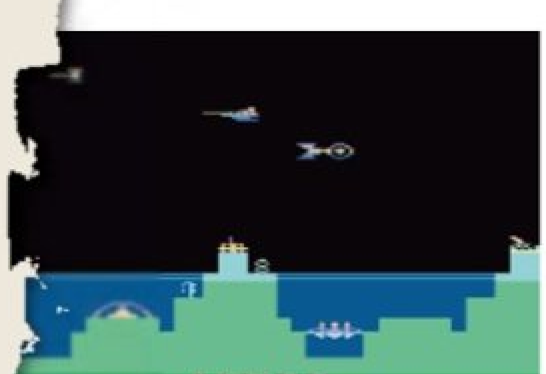
"Atari announced they would be losing money," remembers Dennis. "That didn't surprise me – they were making a lot of stupid decisions at that point – but that put the kibosh on us going public. We were advised to wait a few months while everything calmed down, but things just got worse and the market fell apart. That was a truly black time at Imagic."

The company never recovered from the videogame crash that profoundly affected the console industry. Dennis left in 1983, and after taking on a number of short-term positions,



Koble on Koble

Dennis picks his three favourite projects from his long career



■ **ATLANTIS (VCS)**
I think the games that turn out best are the ones that tend to 'flow' the easiest. *Atlantis* falls into that category. It was a pleasure to work on and came out really well. I was very proud of the final game.



■ **SONIC SPINBALL (MEGA DRIVE)**
As much of a pain as it was, I really enjoyed working on it. What makes a game fun to work on is if you're surrounded by extremely competent people. Peter Morawiec, who was the designer and artist, is a brilliant guy and he made it a pleasure.



■ **CURRENT MYSTERY GAME PROJECT (iOS)**
I can't tell you much about this because we're still working on it. Lyle Rains did the art, I did the design and programming, and it came out extremely well. I don't want to come across as egotistical but I think you'll love it!

Readers' Questions

Slacey1070: If you could change one thing about your career in the industry, what would it be and why?
It would have been nice if Imagic had gone public. You don't get to win the lottery that often! I would have gotten a considerable amount of money, but you know, what I remember from that period is me and my wife looking at million-dollar homes, and arguing incessantly about this or that feature of a house. We were about to get all this money and here we were arguing about how to spend it. Money doesn't buy you happiness, it's true!

Jagfest_UK: What was working for Nolan Bushnell like? Was it really all drugs and hot tubs?
There was a lot of that! We were all pretty young – I was 28 when I joined Atari and was one of the 'old men'. Yes, I went to many events where there were hot tubs and drugs and stuff – I didn't participate in the drugs myself, but many people did. I did have some hot tub episodes! There were some good stories, but at the same time, people worked really hard and were passionate about what they were doing.

Northway: Was there a divide between the home computer and 2600 programmers at Atari?
No, the rivalry was between coin-op and VCS programmers. The coin-op people were very strong technically, typically having degrees in mathematics or physics, and they created original games – Cadillacs in their field. They resented VCS programmers, who were generally younger and didn't necessarily have a technical background. We had musicians, artists, Chris Crawford was an astronomer, and they would convert a coin-op game for the VCS and sell millions. Coin-op resented that! It's funny because later, it became a badge of honour to have programmed the VCS because it was actually more challenging.

Merman: How did you create the courses for the *PGA* games?
Back in 1989, if you called up a golf club and asked for the digitised drawings or camera views of their course, they looked at you blankly, so I asked them to send me the score card they gave out to people playing the course, which usually had an artist's drawing of each hole. I'd take that, attach tracing paper onto it and trace the green, the sand traps, the lake and whatever, and attach that to my computer screen. High-tech, eh?



The striking original flyer art for Dennis' first release, Sprint 2.





» [Mega Drive] Getting 3D polygonal games like *Steel Talons* onto 16-bit consoles was a considerable achievement.

including a collaboration with Rob Fulop, he received a call from old Atari coin-op buddy, Ed '*Battlezone*' Rotberg, offering him a job at Nolan Bushnell's post-Atari venture, Videa. Dennis gratefully accepted the position of software director, just at the point when the company was bought out by Bally and renamed Bally Sente. "Suddenly, we had a corporate partner with deep pockets," he smiles.

Dennis stuck with Sente for several years, overseeing the development of numerous arcade titles and finding time to have a more hands-on coding role with the *Stocker* series. The first game revisited the overhead racing format he'd pioneered with *Sprint 2*, while 1986's *Night Stocker* viewed the action from a first-person perspective and plonked a plastic machine gun peripheral next to the steering wheel, allowing some impromptu co-op play. Sente's output was clearly on the decline by this stage, though, and Dennis was tempted away by an interesting offer from two other ex-Atari colleagues, Rich Adam and Roger Hector, now at Electronic Arts. They were keen for EA to release a golf title and so Dennis teamed up with Sente workmate Lee Actor to form Polygames and took on the contract.

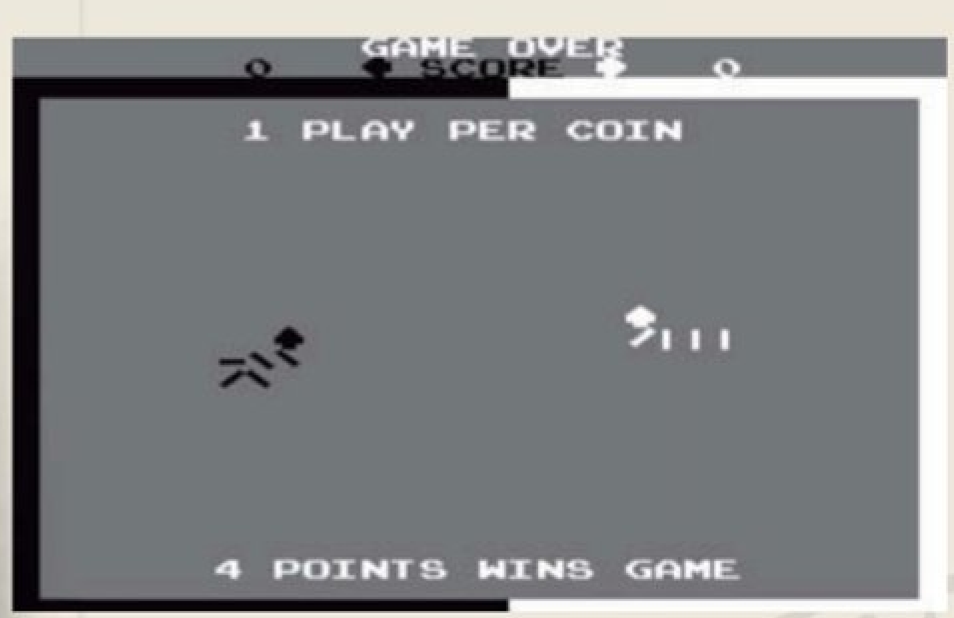
"Rich said he'd try and get us the Jack Nicklaus licence," notes Dennis. "Licensing was becoming a big deal. Six months into development, we found Jack had been offered a better deal by Accolade. We were like, 'Oh man, that was the basis of doing this game!' Rich said, 'Well, we have this pretty lame licence we can probably get fairly easily, called PGA…'"

This unpromising licence would, of course, grow into the defining golf series of the Nineties, particularly dominating the console market. Dennis and Lee drove the annual iterations forward, adding extra features and updating course and player data, though after a decade working on the titles, Dennis acknowledges it's hard to maintain the enthusiasm of those pioneering days at the end of the Eighties. "It can become a creative wasteland. What feature can I add to this year's version that I haven't added before? But it's virtually guaranteed income. *PGA Tour Golf* is responsible for the house I'm talking to you from! Unless you're Bill Gates, it's hard to walk away from the money…"

Trivia

The cabinet art for *Mini Golf*, a coin-op Dennis produced for Bally Sente in 1985, features Roger Hector, one of the heads of Sente, as the golfer, Atari and Sente artist Bob Flemate holding the flag, and Dennis himself as the caddy.

Polygames didn't just stroll down the fairways, mind. While *PGA* paid the mortgage, the company handled numerous coin-op conversions for Tengen, and trying to cram huge arcade titles like *Race Drivin'* and *Steel Talons* into the Mega Drive was daunting. "Those games were moving a huge amount of polygons around – hundreds, if not thousands. I think at the peak, we could get 30 polygons on screen at a time. That was considered a real feat for the Genesis at the time! Sometimes it was a pretty miserable task."



» [Arcade] Atari's *Snake*-like *Dominos* coin-op was inspired by Gremlin's *Blockade*, a big arcade hit in 1976.

> "It took us two weeks to raise $2 million. Boom, there was the money! Imagic was off and running"

Dennis talks more fondly about less polygon-hungry titles he brought to the Mega Drive, such as *Pit-Fighter* and *RoadBlasters*, and is especially proud of his final 'big' title for Sega's console, *Sonic Spinball*. With *Sonic 3* unable to meet its scheduled release date and the prospect of a *Sonic*-free holiday season, Dennis was drafted in to oversee the 'hedgehog plays pinball' project, with an incredibly tight deadline of six months to deliver the game in time for Christmas 1993. "We were the hired guns and we literally worked on it 16 hours a day, seven days a week for three months," says Dennis, still wincing from the experience. "I told Lee, if I ever agree to do this again, shoot me. But it sold 3.5 million copies and Sega paid us a fortune… for years! Finally, five years ago, they paid us several hundred thousand dollars to get the rights back!"

Dennis continued to work in the games business through the Nineties and beyond, consulting on numerous game projects, working on Namco's *Pac-Man Bowling*, collaborating with old friends Rich Adam and Ed Rotberg on a string of releases for Mine Shaft, and many other diverse endeavours. He finally retired several years ago but was tempted back into the videogame fray in 2011, courtesy of an intriguing offer from industry stalwart Seamus Blackley.

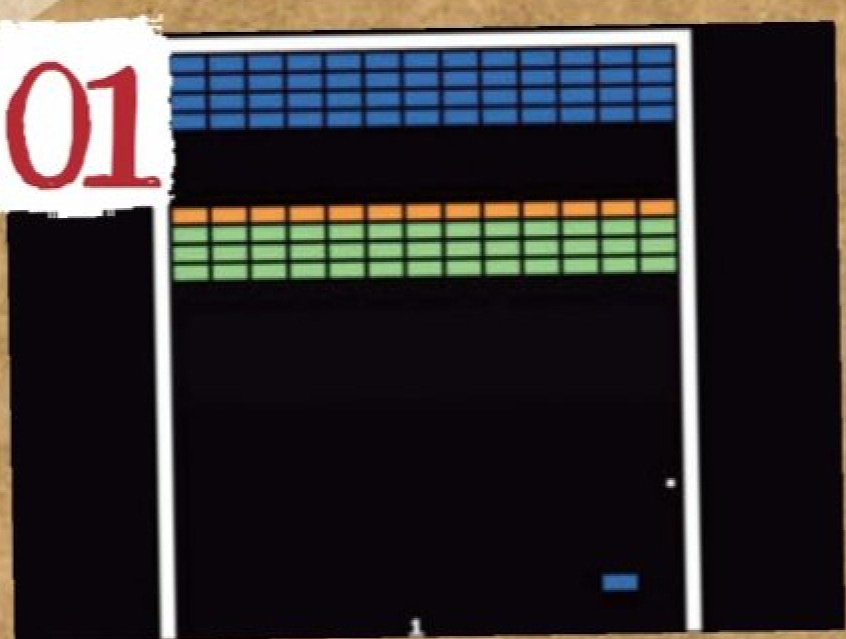
"Seamus got these old geezers together and offered us a big bag of money to come back and work on games," chuckles Dennis, who is now part of Innovative Leisure, working alongside such legendary game designers as Ed Logg (*Asteroids*) and Lyle Rains (*Tank*). "Producing prototypes for iOS games has been incredibly fun, working with really competent guys from the old days and a bunch of young interns, willing to work 24 hours a day. I would've worked for free – don't tell Seamus that! And hey, hopefully we'll come up with another *Angry Birds*!"

This old bird is certainly anything but angry…

Dennis Koble

Desert Island Disks

The games that Dennis Koble just couldn't live without and why he loves them



01 Breakout (COIN-OP)

One of my all-time favourite games and still fun to this day. It's easy to learn, difficult to master, as the classic Nolan Bushnell phrase goes. It's immensely satisfying when you break through and it goes into automatic mode, breaking the wall from the inside.



02 Myst (PC)

One of the first games to really create an atmosphere. You felt like you were transported to this other world. The puzzles were interesting and I had tremendous fun with my daughter figuring them out.



03 EverQuest (PC)

One of the first MMORPGs I got into, and I spent seven years playing it! Totally absorbing and I really related to my characters in the game. And I enjoy the social aspect of an online game.



04 EverQuest II (PC)

The updated version with better graphics! I was more of a lone player with the first game, but with the second, I started joining guilds, going on raids, and it was really fun. I'm still playing it to this day!



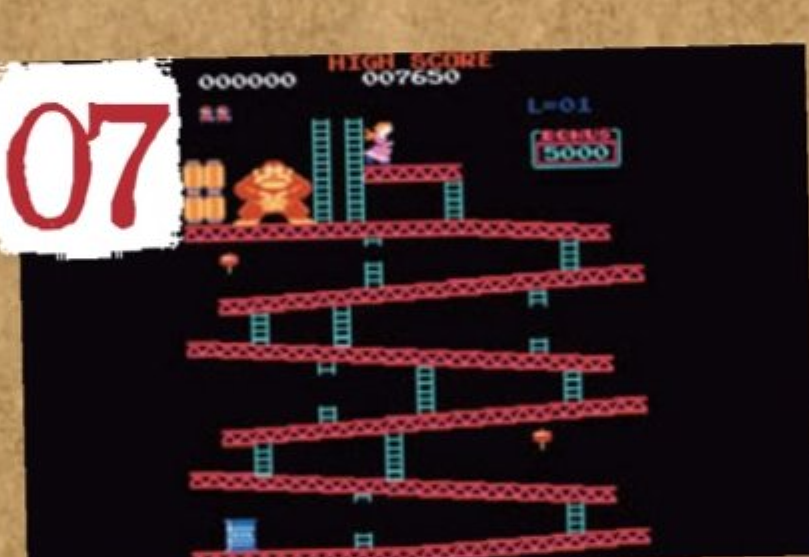
05 Rift (PC)

I got very involved with this about a year ago. It was done by the original designers of *EverQuest II*. The art is stunning, all the elements of the gameplay are so well done, great storylines… so much good stuff. I stopped playing six months ago, but I'm thinking of restarting because I miss it so much!



06 Diablo III (PC)

Along with *EverQuest II*, this is what I'm playing at the moment. It took them forever to come out with it. It's a mindless game but incredibly mesmerising. Click, click, click, boom, boom, boom! It doesn't take rocket science to play it, but it's really well done, with beautiful art too, of course.



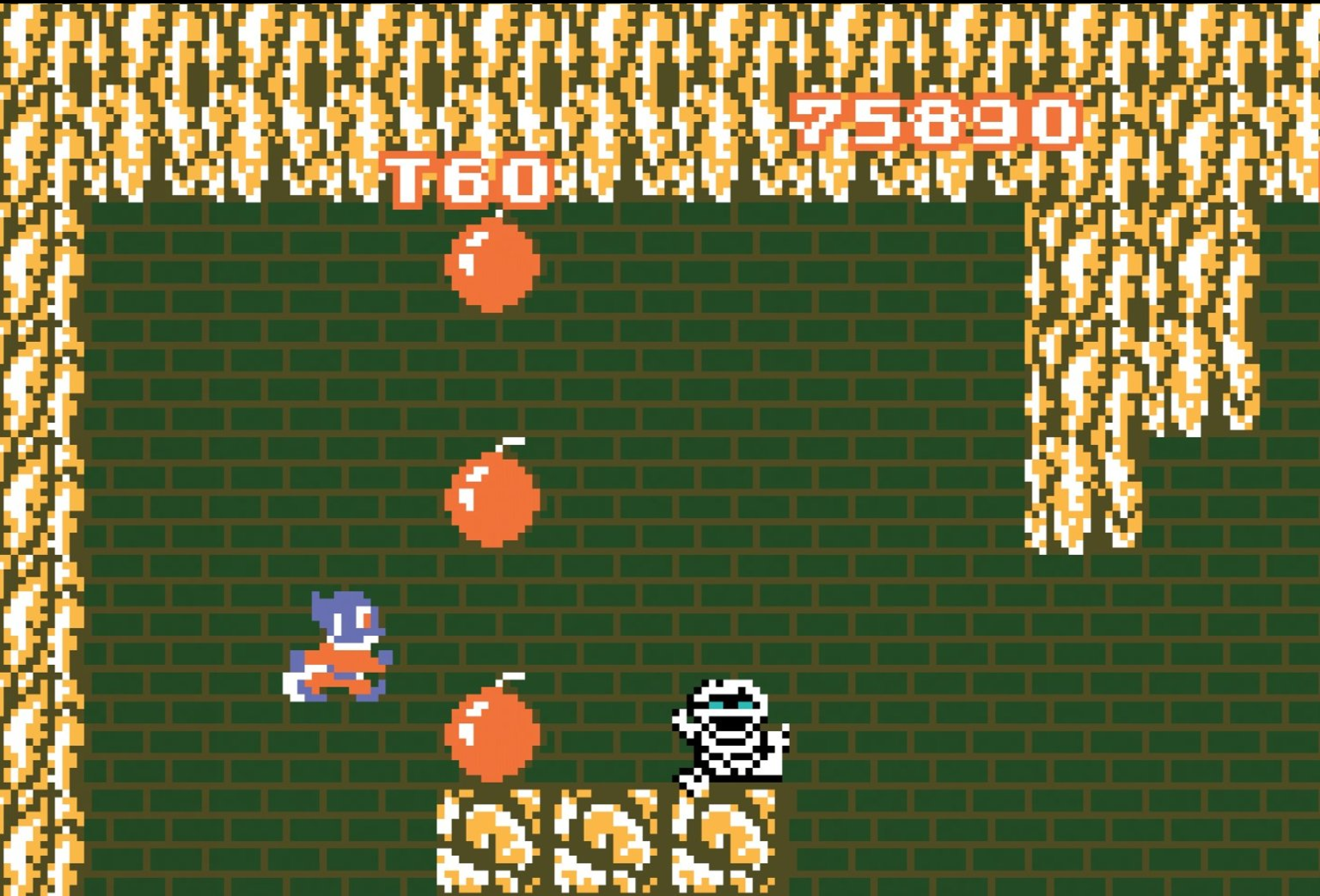
07 Donkey Kong (COIN-OP)

I really enjoyed it, though I never did master it. Again, very repetitive – you keep jumping over those barrels – but I loved the cuteness and comedic appeal.



08 Missile Command (COIN-OP)

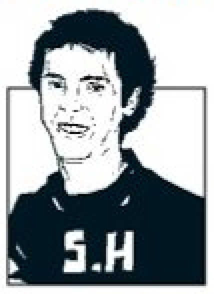
One of the games at Seamus Blackley's Supercade is a restored *Missile Command* machine, and when all of us Innovative Leisure guys are down there for a brainstorming session, this is the game we're all trying to beat each other at. It's just so well done.



Mighty Bomb Jack

A SEQUEL THAT DON'T KNOW JACK

RETROREVIVAL



» ARCADE
» TECMO
» 1986

A really simple way for a developer to create sequels to a single-screen arcade game is to just add scrolling stages. *Rainbow Islands* is a good example of this practice, *Super Mario Bros.* is another, but sadly *Mighty Bomb Jack* is a less successful example, for reasons I will explain.

Debuting in arcades, *Mighty Bomb Jack* saw the spandex-clad bomb disposal expert blast back onto screens in something a good deal closer to a side-scrolling platformer. The problem though is that he really wasn't suited for it. Jack was never the easiest of heroes to steer around a screen (which was part of the fun, in fact).

He would launch himself quickly into the air, bouncing around the place like a mad flea, so trying to get him to actually land on a platform half way up the screen took a fair bit of going. Normally you'd just overshoot it and land on one on the way down – which was fine because you could use this time to defuse bombs as you went. To keep his speed somewhat in check the playing field was a single-screen cage, so you could never bounce too speedily away.

Also, despite dressing like a superhero, Jack couldn't actually attack his enemies. He could only get rid of them from the screen by turning them into coins via collection of a power-up. Now apply both these things to the platform template, and a few issues clearly arise, namely a lot of frustrating hanging in the air and waiting for Jack to land, plus avoiding enemies you can't kill at will, fine in a collect-'em-up but not so good in a platformer. Though that's not to say *Mighty Bomb Jack* is a terrible sequel.

Tecmo did at least try to expand on the gameplay. The single-screen gameplay from the original does return to an extent; each stage is divided into a platformer stage and a level that is more akin to the original game. It also introduced a variety of costumes for Jack, each one imbuing him with different abilities, from allowing him to open treasure chests more easily to turning enemies into gold coins. *Mighty Bomb Jack* is a unique and challenging platformer, but for me sadly it just isn't a patch on the brilliance of the original. *


M3
67880
T34
M3
68490
T33
x1



>> It was only announced in April, but we've already hammered the new New Super Mario Bros to give you our definitive verdict. Other highlights include the return of Tony Hawk, and a brand new Frogger remix.

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
New Super Mario Bros 2
It's not as ace as earlier *Mario* games, but I still found myself enjoying it.



STUART
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater HD
The lack of levels and missing songs disappoint, but the fundamental gameplay remains as good as ever.



DAVID
New Super Mario Bros 2
I'm absolutely loving this. But then I'm a sucker for anything *Mario*-related…

New Super Mario Bros 2

MARIO'S BACK, BUT HE'S LOST SOME OF HIS MAGIC

INFORMATION

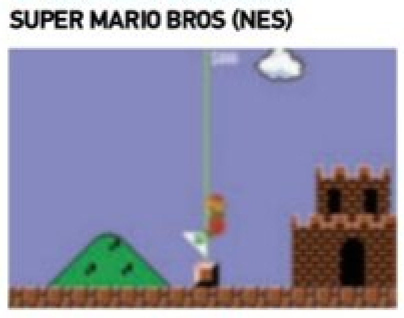
- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** 3DS
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £34.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» Mario first made his appearance in 1981's *Donkey Kong*, in the form of Jumpman. It was the NES's *Super Mario Bros* that transformed him into a videogame superstar, and he's since gone on to become Nintendo's mascot and the most recognisable character in videogame history.

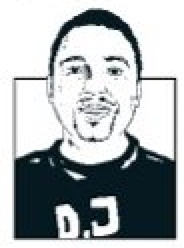
✱WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SUPER MARIO BROS (NES)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
SUPER MARIO BROS 3D LAND (3DS)





Lately, *Mario* games appear to be divided into two distinct camps. 3D efforts like the *Galaxy* series and *Super Mario 3D Land* tend to overflow with genuinely creative level design and magical ideas, while the efforts like *New Super Mario Bros* play it a little safer. By the numbers, if you will. Sadly, *New Super Mario Bros 2* definitely falls into the latter category.

Let's get one thing straight, though: Nintendo's new game still remains very, very enjoyable and is worth investigating if you're a fan of Nintendo's rotund plumber. After all, this is Nintendo, the king of the platformer, and its latest *Mario* game certainly ticks all the right boxes, meaning the average gamer is going to be more than happy with this latest adventure.

Mario controls just as he should, making it a joy to watch him scramble his way through the cleverly designed stages, kicking Koopas and collecting coins. There are plenty of secrets to discover, including three Warp worlds, and it will take a fair amount of time to collect the three giant coins found on each main stage, so well are some of them hidden. The levels themselves are well created, matching the worlds in which they are found and boasting a far better structure than those found in the original DS game.

There are also a few new gameplay mechanics that weren't in previous *New Super Mario Bros* titles. The most obvious is the return of the Raccoon Suit, which gives Mario the ability to fly and really explore the impressive-looking levels. Other new suits include Gold Mario, which turns the plumber completely metallic and gives him the power to lob gold fireballs, turning anything they hit into coins; and White Raccoon Mario, which makes him invincible for the duration of a stage. Add in new items like blocks that dish out anything from five to fifty coins, and Gold Blocks, which stick to Mario's head and let him spit out coins for a finite amount of time, and *New Super Mario Bros 2*'s focus on collecting coins starts to become abundantly clear.





» [3DS] This new item lets Mario spit out coins for a set amount of time. Very useful.









✱GO DEEPER

>> *New Super Mario Bros 2* was officially announced by Satoru Iwata on 21 April 2012.

>> Bowser Jr no longer makes an appearance. Main baddie duties are instead giving to the Koopalings.

>> While the game can be completed in around four hours, there are additional extras to discover.

» [3DS] The 3D effect is one of the most basic we've seen, detracting from the slick visuals.



» [3DS] Coins play an important part in *New Super Mario Bros 2*. Can you collect a million of them?



Return of the Koopalings

New Super Mario Bros 2 has plenty of little nods to *Super Mario Bros 3* on the NES. This is perhaps most obvious with the return of the Koopalings, who are on hand to cause Mario no end of mischief as he attempts to rescue his beloved Princess. The Koopalings were a brilliant addition to *Super Mario Bros 3*, offering plenty of humour and feeling genuinely different to each other. Sadly, they've not been as well realised in this latest outing, and each of them is ridiculously easy to defeat. Dodge their basic attack, jump on their heads three times and it's all over. Fortunately, Bowser does put up more of a challenge when you finally meet him.

Coin-collecting is certainly the name of the game in Mario's latest adventure, and you'll often finish a stage with a good few hundred of them amassed, all of which are put towards the 1 million total that Nintendo is so keen for you to amass. And sadly, this is where things begin to fall down a little…

Coins will literally shower down at you in some parts of the game, and while it's fun working out where they all are, the flipside is that this becomes one of the easiest *Mario* games yet, due to the insanely high number of lives you can pick up. Yes, certain parts will flummox you, but the get-out-of-jail White Raccoon Suit is never too far away, adding further to *New Super Mario Bros 2*'s ease. The real downside of coin-collecting, however, is that it simply turns the game into a thankless grind, particularly once you discover what the 1 million coins actually unlock…

The add-on gameplay mode, Coin Rush, where you go though three randomly selected stages and must collect as many coins as possible, goes some way towards alleviating the thankless collecting, but even this feels like something of an afterthought. Especially when the focus is on score and there's no option to compete online against everyone else.

And that's one of our biggest complaints with *New Super Mario Bros 2*: it all feels phoned in, as if the *Mario* name is more than enough to justify the purchase, allowing Nintendo to concentrate on the superior 3D games. This is perhaps most obvious in the 3D itself, which is really unimpressive and lacks the pure magic that *3D Land* offered. Turn up the slider and the background images immediately start to become blurred, changing the once-beautiful art design into an ugly haze. It's obviously designed to create depth of field, but the effect isn't that good, making us wonder if *New Super Mario Bros 2* was originally planned for the DS before it was retooled to raise interest in Nintendo's newer console. Regardless, we soon turned it off, allowing us to really enjoy the vibrant-looking worlds that Nintendo has created.

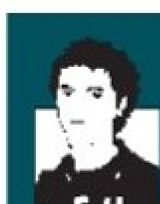
The multiplayer aspect of *New Super Mario Bros 2* has also been greatly toned down from its predecessors, with bonuses like the fun mini-games found in the first game no longer making an appearance. There's no denying that *New Super Mario Bros 2* is a fun game, but it could have been a great one. It's a solid enough entry in the *Mario* universe, but *Super Mario 3D Land* remains a far better game.

In a nutshell

While *New Super Mario Bros 2* is an enjoyable little platformer, it does lack the sparkle and imagination of the plumber's most recent 3D outings. A by-the-numbers platformer that lacks the magic of past games.

>> Score **78%**

OPINION



Mario's latest is a return to the classic platforming action of old. The game design and fun factor is high, but for me it just doesn't have the same wow factor as some of Mario's more recent outings, namely the wonderful *Super Mario 3D Land*. The 3D effect lacks clarity and the multiplayer isn't as strong as it was in the first game. Fans will still lap it up, though…

Stuart Hunt

» [3DS] Mario can once again team up with Luigi, making it even easier to get through levels.



>> PITFALL!



» [iOS] This new *Pitfall!* reboots the 2600 classic as a 3D infinite runner, very similar to *Temple Run*.

★ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Pitfall!

>> Activision's new mobile studio is headed by Team17 co-founder Martyn Brown and includes former Rockstar developers.

>> *Pitfall!* is the second bestselling 2600 game, selling 4 million copies and making Activision around $50 million.

★WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

ATOMIC RUNNER CHELNOV (ARCADE)



▽ SOMETHING NEW

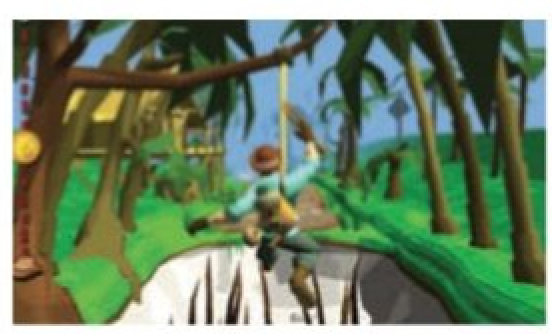
TEMPLE RUN (iOS)





INDIANA JONES AND THE FAST CRUSADE

Pitfall!





We were pleasantly surprised by this reboot of David Crane's classic adventure/platformer, *Pitfall!*, which transports iconic adventurer Pitfall Harry into a polygon-constructed infinite runner in the vein of *Temple Run*.

For those unfamiliar with the genre, the formula is as simple as they come. In front of Harry is a marathon level primed with pitfalls (naturally), obstacles and dangers, from falling trees and rolling rocks, to snapping snakes and 'gressive gators. And as Harry dashes his way through this deadly, jungle-themed assault course, it's your job to help him avoid colliding with these hazards via timely touch-screen inputs and a bit of tilting.

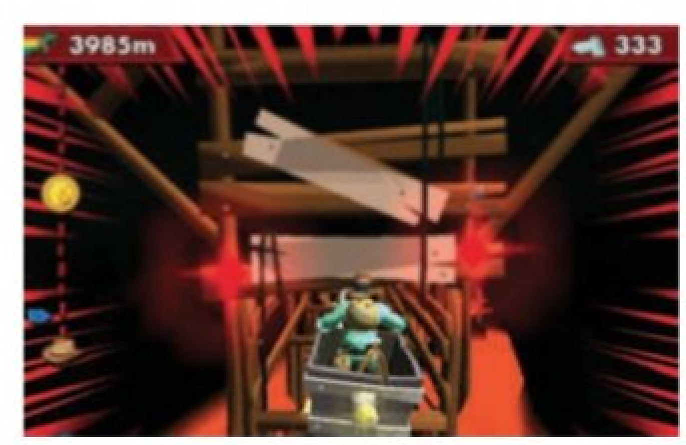
Colliding with almost any object will see Harry sent back to the start, unless he's managed to reach a purchasable checkpoint and you're willing to spend some of his amassed credits to continue from where he fell.

Swiping the screen upwards makes Harry jump and downwards makes him perform a skid/roll, while left and right make him perform side jumps. Tapping the screen makes him snap his bullwhip, taking out any scorpions and snakes blocking his path, and you can manoeuvre him more delicately by moving the iPad.

With its simple controls, fast pace and perfectly pitched difficulty level, *Pitfall!* quickly becomes exhilarating, especially as the lone long level features both branching routes and plenty of variety: one minute Harry is in a mine cart, trying to stay on the rickety, winding tracks; the next he's astride a motorbike, tearing though the jungle, skidding beneath fallen tree trunks.

Added longevity comes from a selection of achievements to unlock, which are nicely presented as Activision sashes, along with extras to buy, including different costumes for Harry and power-ups that make the game slightly easier.

While *Pitfall!*'s graphics certainly won't win any awards, there is a reason for their



bare-bones look. The clean polygon art style keeps the game chugging along at a pleasant pace and makes spotting the upcoming dangers in the distance easier on the eyes. Not only that, but it also subtly harkens back to the bright, blocky, bold look of the 2600 original.

Overall, then, *Pitfall!* is a polished infinite runner and a solid and respectful update of Harry's first adventure.

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** iOS
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £0.69
- » **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- » **DEVELOPER:** THE BLAST FURNACE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

BRIEF HISTORY

» David Crane created a little running man in 1979 and finally unveiled him to the world in 1982 with *Pitfall!*. The game became the second bestselling 2600 game ever, and spawned a number of sequels spanning generations of game systems. For a more in-depth history about the series, you can read our *Pitfall!* feature this month.

OPINION



It might not feature the same exploration of the 2600 original, but *Pitfall!* on iOS nevertheless captures the essence of Harry's first adventure. It's also the slickest and most addictive *Temple Run* clone we've played, and has become almost impossible to put down.

Darran Jones

In a nutshell

***Pitfall!* does nothing innovative, but it is one of the most fun and polished infinite runners we've played, at a bargain price. It's fun, entertaining and pays respect to the original.**

>> Score 84%



Death Rally

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PC » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** iOS » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £7.99 » **PUBLISHER:** REMEDY » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1-6

>> **This is an** impressive update of the fun iOS racer, which Remedy released late last year. There's only one new track available, but the core game has more than enough to keep the most hardened arcade racer busy. Essentially a cross between *Mad Max* and *Super Sprint*, *Death Rally* has a lightweight story but is a lot of fun thanks to its smartly designed tracks and a solid variety of challenges to compete in that range from one-on-one races to the titular Death Rally. The latter feels a little messy, and there's a large emphasis on grinding your way to upgrades throughout the game – you earn new cars and weapons by picking parts up as you race – but the fast-paced nature of the competition means *Death Rally* never gets boring for too long.

>> Score **70%**

Pinball Arcade

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS VITA » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** iOS, XBOX 360, PS3 » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £7.99 » **PUBLISHER:** FARSIGHT STUDIOS » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1-2



>> **It's taken an** age for UK gamers to get *Pinball Arcade* on the Vita and PS3, but the wait has been worth it. Your entry fee earns you four classic pinball tables: *Tales Of The Arabian Nights*, *Black Hole*, *Ripley's Believe It Or Not!* and *Theatre Of Magic*, with more tables available as DLC. All four are beautifully replicated, are as authentic as possible, and play completely differently to each other. The ball physics are superb as well, easily mimicking the feel of an actual table. Another nice bonus is that one copy of the game buys you both the Vita and PS3 versions, making it even better value for money. We'd have preferred a few more tables for our cash, but there's no denying that you can play a mean game of pinball with Farsight's new game.

>> Score **88%**



Tony Hawk's Pro Skater HD

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX 360 » **ALSO ON:** PS3
» **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> **Activision's HD remake** feels like a missed opportunity. There are a huge number of absent levels, the soundtrack has been culled, there's no ability to play multiplayer locally, and Spider-Man is nowhere to be seen. Having said that, it remains a faithful update to play, with good representations of the original levels, additional quest objectives and the same intense tricking that made the first two games so much fun. It's just a shame it feels so sterile.

>> Score **68%**



Frogger: Hyper Arcade Edition

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX 360 » **ALSO ON:** PS3, Wii
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1-4

>> **Konami's re-imagining of** *Frogger* is both long overdue and highly entertaining. Featuring a variety of slick skins, aping everything from *Castlevania* to *Geometry Wars*, this revels in its madness. It delivers plenty of fun modes that range from rescuing as many frogs as possible to painting tiled pictures by moving your frog over them. There's even a deathmatch mode. An excellent party game and a welcome reboot of one of Konami's oldest franchises.

>> Score **80%**



Alien Breed

» **SYSTEM:** iOS » **ALSO ON:** N/A
» **PRICE:** £1.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Team17 has gone** above and beyond for *Alien Breed*'s 21st anniversary. This update has an enhanced new look, which you can turn off if you prefer the Amiga version, and twin-stick-style controls, which makes the blasting much easier. The original game has also been tweaked, adjusting the difficulty and signposting levels so that it's harder to get disoriented, and Team17 has even included the special edition version as well as a brand new episode called Convergence. Only some fiddly controls really let it down.

>> Score **75%**



Spy vs Spy

» **SYSTEM:** iOS » **ALSO ON:** N/A
» **PRICE:** £0.69 » **PLAYERS:** 1–2

>> **It's a good** month for iOS remakes. *Spy vs Spy* is an utterly charming title that captures all the backstabbing fun of the original games. It boasts extremely tight and responsive controls, making it easy to lay traps for your opponent. It looks pretty as well, with slick new visuals, as well as an option that emulates the style of the original C64 game. Longevity is assured thanks to 16 additional embassies to explore, new custom matches, and an excellent multiplayer mode that supports online and local play. Highly recommended.

>> Score **87%**

RETROROUND-UP

>> Every month we take a look at the latest classics that have been re-released for a new generation of gamers



★ DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH

Jet Set Radio HD



INFORMATION
- » **System:** Dreamcast
- » **Buy it for:** Roughly £10
- » **Buy it from:** XBLA, PSN, Steam
- » **Score:** ★★★★★

Sega's latest digital offering is a port of its popular Dreamcast game, *Jet Set Radio*, and it's utterly superb. By far one of the most impressive aspects of this fantastic update is that Sega has managed to secure virtually every single track from the original game – only Deavid Soul's *Yappie Feet* and OB One's *Many Styles* are missing – and, in doing so, avoided the pitfalls of many HD remakes.

Crazy Taxi suffered massively from Sega's inability to reacquire the original music, so it's pleasing to see it go to such lengths here, especially as the *Jet Set Radio* soundtrack is an integral part of the overall experience.

Jet Set Radio was already a distinctive-looking game, but it now looks incredible thanks to its mesmerising high-definition makeover. It runs extremely well to boot, rarely stuttering as you skate around the packed streets of future Tokyo, grinding and tagging walls. It's a near-perfect port that manages to look as fresh and exciting as it did 12 years ago.

Gameplay-wise, little has changed, and while it feels slightly difficult in places, it retains its excellent balance between score attack and exploration. The controls do feel a little floaty in places compared to similar games, but this is mainly needed in order to continue your all-important skating lines. A new camera also helps the overall experience.

The whole package is finished off with a number of little extras that range from an excellent making-of film to videos for some of *Jet Set Radio*'s most popular songs. It's another superb port of a well-loved Dreamcast release, and a fine piece of fan service to boot. Roll on *NiGHTS HD*…

>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



Rod Land
- » **System:** Arcade
- » **Buy it for:** £1.49
- » **Buy it from:** App Store
- » **Score:** ★★★★☆

» We've always had a soft spot for Jaleco's *Rod Land*, so we were pleased when we discovered it was available to play on iOS. The iPad version is our system of choice, due to the larger playing area, but it's superb on both thanks to its extremely responsive controls. A clever single-screen platformer, which is only let down by the omission of the two-player mode that featured in the arcade original.



Avenging Spirit
- » **System:** Arcade
- » **Buy it for:** £1.49
- » **Buy it from:** App Store
- » **Score:** ★★☆☆☆

» We love the concept of *Avenging Spirit*. You essentially play a ghost who can possess different characters and use their abilities to take out baddies. While the original game is a fun, quirky little run-and-gun shooter, it suffers greatly on iPad because the virtual stick can't keep up with the fast pace. There's nothing wrong with the conversion itself, but the controls will test even the biggest fans.



Alundra
- » **System:** PSone
- » **Buy it for:** £3.99
- » **Buy it from:** PSN
- » **Score:** ★★★★★

» *Alundra* remains one of the best *Zelda* clones of all time, and certainly the best on the original PlayStation. While the story starts off a little predictably, *Alundra* works perfectly thanks to its excellent characters, gorgeous soundtrack and some truly stunning art that gives it a look reminiscent of the 16-bit era. It's tough in places, but as the game unfolds, so does the story and you'll soon become completely riveted.



Blazing Star
- » **System:** Neo Geo
- » **Buy it for:** £1.99
- » **Buy it from:** App Store
- » **Score:** ★★★☆☆

» The good news is that *Blazing Star* on iOS looks incredible once you turn the smoothing off and add the scanlines. The bad news is that it takes a lot of time to get used to the controls. It's extremely hard to hit diagonals with the virtual D-pad, and the touch controls don't feel as responsive as those found in Cave games. Hopefully these niggles will be sorted with a patch, as it's an otherwise superb shooter.

▼ VIRTUAL CONSOLE

Crikey, we've actually got some new games this month. They're crackers as well, largely courtesy of SNK Playmore.

The Last Blade
System: Neo Geo
Buy it for: 900 Points
Buy it from: Virtual Console
Score: ★★★★★

Metal Slug 3
System: Neo Geo
Buy it for: 900 Points
Buy it from: Virtual Console
Score: ★★★★★

Mega Man X2
System: SNES
Buy it for: 800 Points
Buy it from: Virtual Console
Score: ★★★★☆

Super Street Fighter II
System: Mega Drive
Buy it for: 800 Points
Buy it from: Virtual Console
Score: ★★★★☆



▼ PSN

Aside from the rather superb *Alundra*, it's another quiet month for PlayStation 3 owners. Pity.

Gang Wars
System: Arcade
Buy it for: £1.99
Buy it from: PSN Minis
Score: ★★☆☆☆

Time Soldiers
System: Arcade
Buy it for: £1.99
Buy it from: PSN Minis
Score: ★★★☆☆

Impossible Mission
System: PS2
Buy it for: £3.99
Score: ★★★★★

Chess Challenger
System: PS2
Buy it for: £3.99
Buy it from: PSN
Score: ★★★☆☆



▼ PC SERVICES

There have been a number of interesting games on PC this month. Time to fill your boots.

Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness
System: PC
Buy it for: $9.99 (£6.36)
Buy it from: www.gog.com
Score: ★★☆☆☆

Guilty Gear Isuka
System: PC
Buy it for: $5.99 (£3.81)
Buy it from: www.gog.com
Score: ★★★★☆

Enclave Gold
System: PC
Buy it for: €4.99 (£3.92)
Buy it from: www.dotemu.com
Score: ★★★☆☆

Thief: Deadly Shadows
System: PC
Buy it for: £6.99
Buy it from: www.steampowered.com
Score: ★★★★☆



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HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews



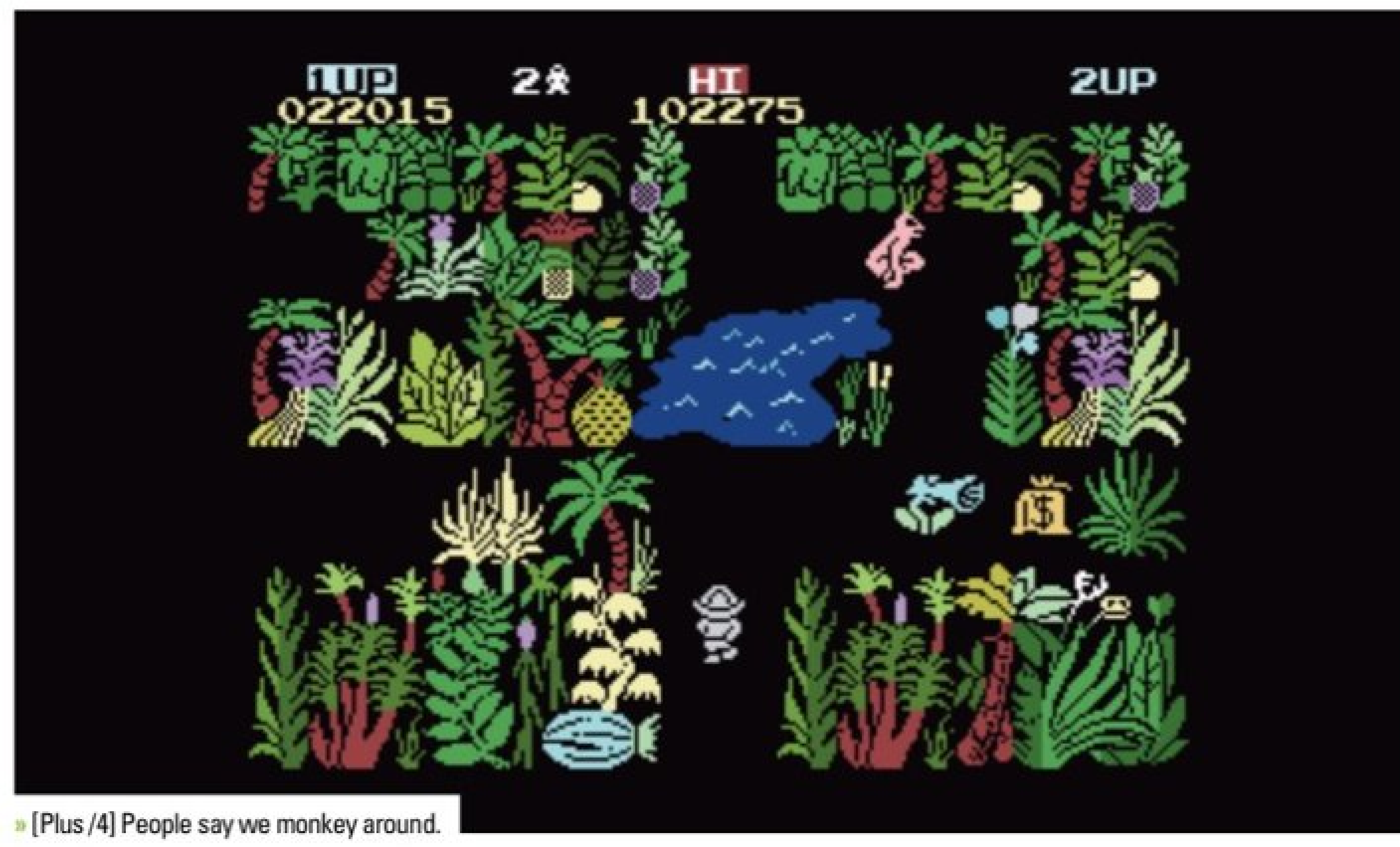
Last issue's intro saw me burbling away, trying to encourage people to learn coding, so I've got a link for those interested in 6502-based machines: an online course called Easy 6502 which uses a Javascript-based 6502 assembler and simulator so the examples aren't just static on a page, but readers can watch them run! Potential 6502 gurus go to: http://kikstart.eu/easy-6502

I'M ON THE HUNT, I'M AFTER YOU

SABRE WULF



» [Plus /4] Who would live in a house like this?



» [Plus /4] People say we monkey around.

During one of his many expeditions, daring explorer Sabre Man loses his footing at the cliff top, high above a previously undiscovered valley and finds himself tumbling base over apex into trouble. The rocks and savage predators glimpsed during the fall tell him that climbing out isn't going to be an option, but he has by sheer chance unceremoniously landed next to an ancient tablet. The tablet hints that a magical amulet will unlock a mystical gateway to freedom, but annoyingly, it's been split into four chunks and distributed around the valley.

And Sabre Man isn't alone; the inscription also warns readers to avoid the lair of the titular Sabre Wulf. As well as this ominous threat, it doesn't take long for our hero to realise that death can also appear from the very ground on which he stands, in the form of venomous animals and insects. As a talented fencer, the weaker of these can be dispatched by waving his trusty sword at them, while more substantial beasts are best avoided. Some of the local vegetation offer a little help as well; orchids that magically bloom from the ground for a few seconds at a time can imbue passers by with helpful powers such as extra speed or cause sickness, completely disorient and even induce a zombie-like state. These effects are temporary and even the less useful-sounding powers offer immunity from the local wildlife while in effect.

So *Sabre Wulf* is, for those unaware of Ultimate's flip-screen action adventure, a game about exploration, survival and the collection of items. As with the Spectrum original, the map is a sprawling two hundred and fifty six locations in size – arranged in a sixteen by sixteen screen grid – and offers ample opportunity to get lost. All of the Spectrum's graphical detail has made it over during conversion before being given a re-colouring that takes advantage of the Plus/4's larger palette so this version even retains the colour clash when moving objects pass over each other. The sound is a pretty much direct port of the beeper output, and doesn't really take full advantage of the machine.



» [Plus /4] Who splits these magical amulets up anyway?



FORMAT: COMMODORE PLUS/4
DEVELOPER: GARY COOPER (GC841)
LINK: HTTP://KIKSTART.EU/SABRE-WULF-264
RELEASE: 2012
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK



» [Plus /4] What's the time Mister Wulf?

The original *Sabre Wulf* on the Spectrum was a challenging game that can be unforgiving and that's equally true of this conversion; the maze-like jungle locations sometimes appear samey, so getting lost is an issue, but the Spectrum maps work for the Plus/4 as well so, unless you're the kind of person who enjoys the mapping process or refuses to ask for directions, getting hopelessly lost shouldn't be a regular issue. Although the initial difficulty might be off-putting for some players, it's worth sticking with it because once the first challenge is passed the game itself opens up – and for everybody else, the developer Gary Cooper has already been considering a toned-down version of the game that should be somewhat easier to get into.

89%

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

SNAIL MAZE
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** NES » **DEVELOPER:** SLY DOG STUDIOS
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SNAIL-MAZE-NES » **PRICE:** FREE

We might have a few readers who aren't aware of the hidden Master System game *Snail Maze* but it probably doesn't need much explanation. The name says it all really; there's a cute little snail under joypad control that starts at one point in a maze, has a goal at another point to aim for and a time limit to act as encouragement.

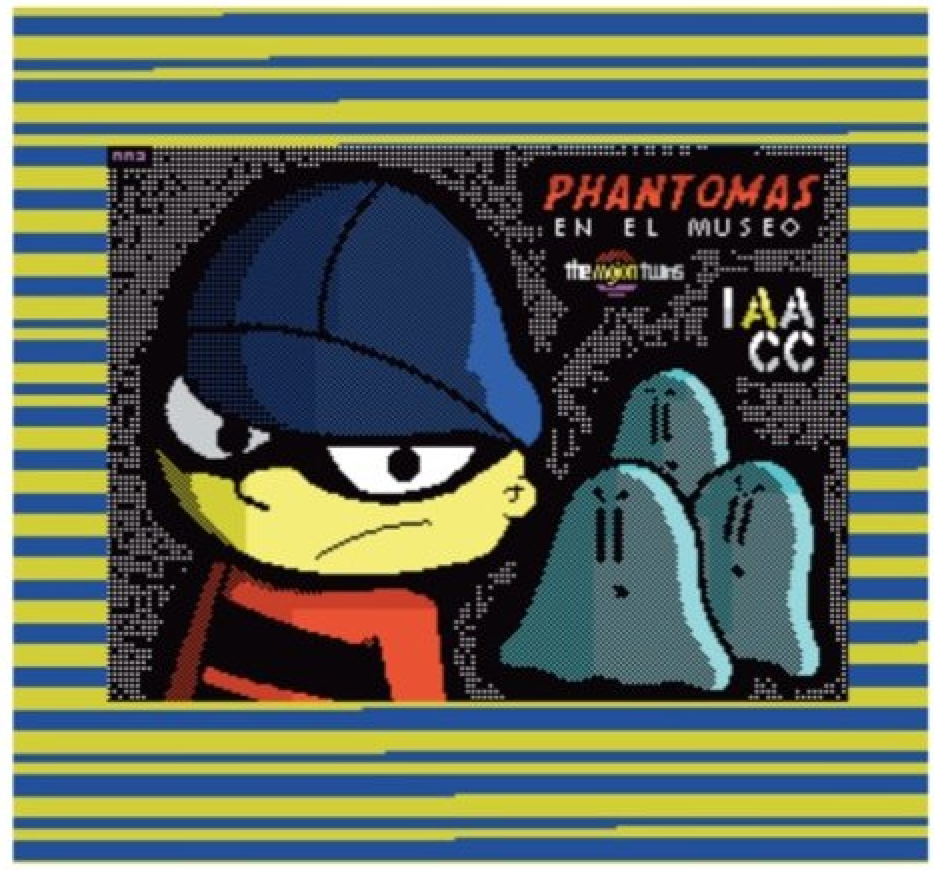
After the cheeky parody of the Master System's start-up logo, the graphics of the game itself are very close to the original, although some colours have been changed slightly during translation.

The twelve mazes are tricky to complete because the clock doesn't get reset at the start of each stage; instead, time left over from each previous maze has a few extra seconds added to it, which means moving at a snail's pace on earlier stages can make the later ones impossible. That said, *Snail Maze* has always been quite engrossing and, with some practise and memorising of paths, can be completed.

83%

» [NES] Oops!





» [Spectrum] Don't get caught alone no, no.

PHANTOMAS EN EL MUSEO
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** THE MOJON TWINS
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/PHANTOMAS-MUSEUM-SPEC » **PRICE:** FREE

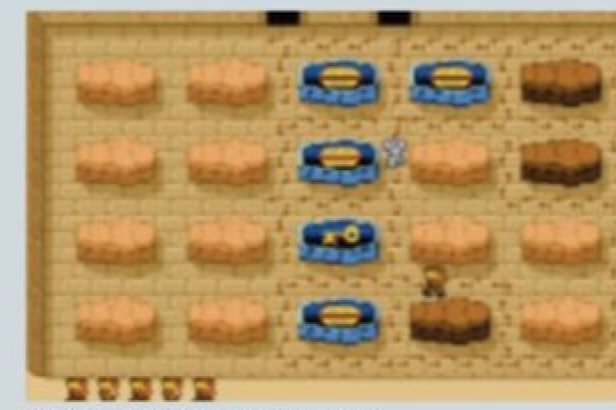
The latest instalment of the Mojon Twins' *Phantomas* series sees the intergalactic thief this time on the right side of the law, recovering five pieces of art by sculptor Pablo Serrano from the rather impressive sounding IAACC Pablo museum in Spain that has been overrun by evil spirits. The museum approached the Mojons to write them into a game as a celebration of International Museum Day 2012, so it's only *slightly* ironic that the storyline sees the majority of its exhibits destroyed by ghostly gangsters!

Fans of the Mojon Twins' work will be immediately at home with *Phantomas En El Museo*; it's a flip-screen platformer with the five sculptures scattered around the map, along with health top-ups and some locked doors that require key-cards to open. The positioning of some enemies makes jumping them tricky to the point where Phantomas is guaranteed to lose a few health points, but the developers have been reasonably generous with the energy top-ups, so gathering all the items shouldn't prove too taxing.

88%

WHAT'S BREWING?

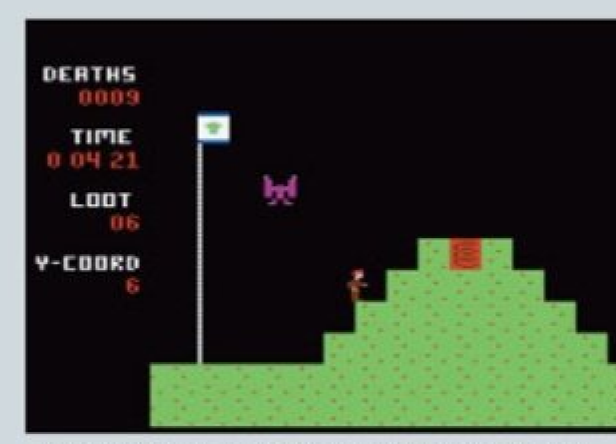
All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [Mega Drive] I want my mummy.

>> ARE YOU MY MUMMY?

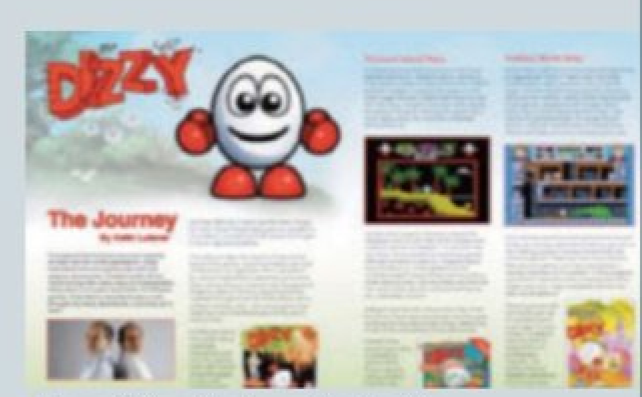
Oh Mummy is a fast-paced single-screen action game that plays a little like *Amidar*, with glittering treasures being revealed as the footprints left behind by the player surround the ancient tombs. And if the name rings a bell that's because it's an enhanced version of the game Spectrum and Amstrad owners enjoyed in the Eighties. The expedition starts at http://kikstart.eu/mummy-md



» [Atari 7800] Nowt to do with the Beiderbecke trilogy.

>> MORE THAN ONE DIRECTION

Atari 7800 fans with a good sense of direction will enjoy *Get Lost!* as it's a platformer with a large map and deviously placed items to collect. It isn't entirely stable at the moment and the programmer wants to add some details like music, but head over to http://kikstart.eu/get-lost-7800 for the ongoing thread at the Atari Age forums with a download in the first post.



» Fans of *Dizzy* will not want to miss this.

>> PIXEL NATION ISSUE TWO NOW ON SALE

There are many fanzines around, but *Pixel Nation* is quickly becoming a firm favourite. Headed by Keith Lutener, who created the excellent NES-bit.com, it's a superb bookazine that covers many different aspects of retro gaming. This issue alone has interesting topics including a look at *Final Fantasy VII* and a retrospective on the *Dizzy* series. It's priced at £8.99 and is available from www.pixel-nation.co.uk.

SURFSHOOTER
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

» **FORMAT:** APPLE 2 » **DEVELOPER:** BRIAN PICCHI
» **DOWNLOAD:** kikstart.eu/surfshooter-a2 » **PRICE:** FREE

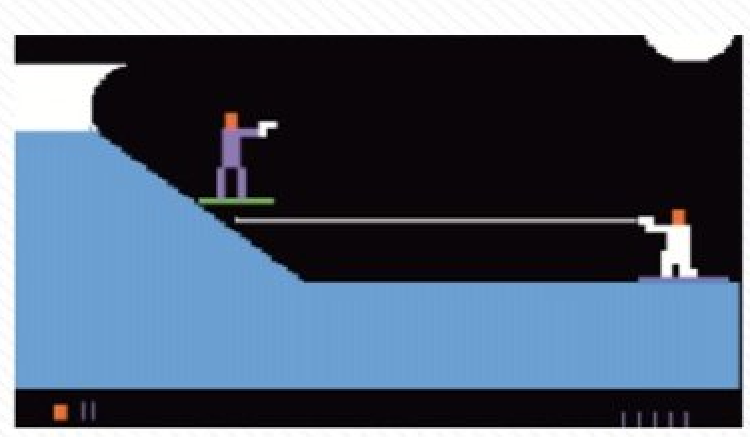
Most surfers only have to concern themselves with waxing their boards or finding the perfect wave, but the Surfshooter has far more on his mind than simply wiping out.

The ocean is a dangerous place, so he's taken a laser gun and plans to use it on hazardous marine life and other board riders who are not only packing heat but have gone surfing with laser-resistant shields. We didn't think it was that dangerous, but what do we know? We don't go outside…

The programmer has at least tried to come up with something unusual for the back story but the game itself is pretty dire to play, with sluggish controls, the very slow visible redrawing of on-screen objects and randomly driven boss battles which rely on luck rather than skill all teaming up against the player. We'd say that *Surfshooter* is possibly worth a couple of goes for the novelty value but doubt that anybody will put any more serious playing time into it.

45%





» [Apple 2] All our eyes on the distant horizon.

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

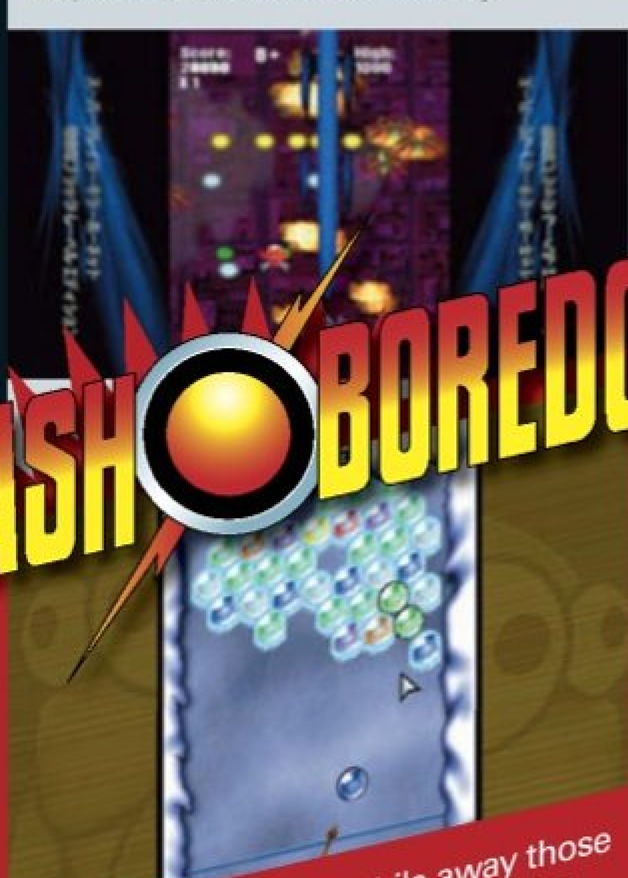
>> MURDER FOR DINNER

Renowned socialite and gossiping busybody Miss Havisham has thrown a swanky dinner party at which she has promised to reveal a huge secret… and this declaration has resulted in her being bumped off by one of the partygoers. So it falls to her friend the professor to solve the murder by exploring Miss H's house and chatting with her visitors to see whose motive drove them to perform the dastardly deed. The 240 Point price tag for *Murder For Dinner* does seem somewhat hefty, but mystery fans can start searching for clues at http://kikstart.eu/dinner-xblig



>> SUPER KILLER HORNET

What shoot-'em-ups have needed for *decades* is more maths ,and now there's *Super Killer Hornet* to meet that demand! As the player blasts their way through enemy territory they can collect falling numbers and symbols to construct a sum, the answer to which appears with two bogus options – selecting the right solution bumps the score multiplier and gives more time in the Black Label play mode. Find it at http://kikstart.eu/killer-hornet-xblig



FLASH BOREDOM

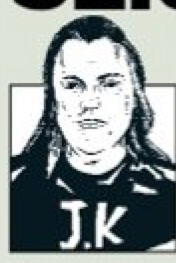
Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on *Retro Gamer*'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at Frozen Bubble Box.

TAKE PUZZLE BOBBLE, USE MORE REALISTIC PHYSICS, HAVE ON-SCREEN BALLS FROZEN UNTIL TOUCHED BY A MOVING MATCH AND DON'T LET EVERYTHING COME CRASHING DOWN IF A GROUP ABOVE THEM ARE REMOVED. THEN SPRINKLE WITH CUTESY GRAPHICS AND JOLLY MUSIC, REMOVE THE IN-GAME TIMER AND SERVE. HTTP://KIKSTART.EU/FROZEN-BUBBLE-FLASH

MORE GAMES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .



SLICK

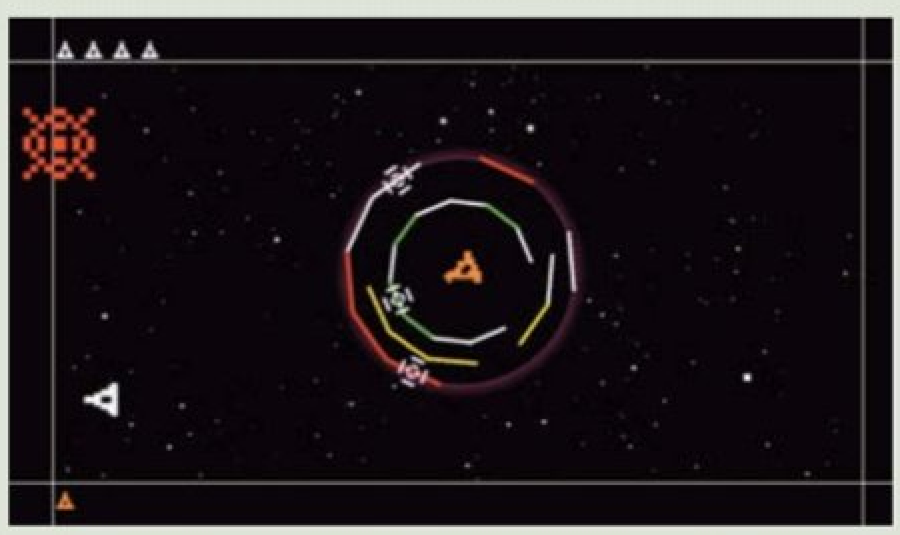


» **DOWNLOAD:** HTTP://KIKSTART.EU/SLICK-XBLIG

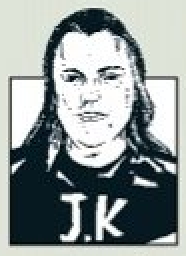
Time for some more retro-themed platform adventuring, this time joining Mick Slick as he works through a hundred levels spread over five stages called Sky, Sahara, Sanctuary, Skirmish and Suffering Slicker.

Slick is clearly proud of its retro heritage, with graphics that are reminiscent of the Game Boy – albeit at a significantly higher resolution – and the programmer has gone out of their way to make the stages themselves almost cruelly difficulty as part of that styling; even the later levels of the first world are frustrating as Mick is unceremoniously dumped at the start of a stage after yet another death.

We certainly don't recommend *Slick* for the majority of players – especially those with high blood pressure – and even fans of hardcore platforming should definitely try the demo first.



STELLAR FORTRESS



» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/STELLAR-FORTRESS-XBLIG

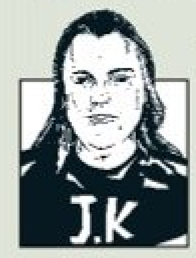
The Stellar Fortress is a massive space-bound cannon, defended by three segmented rings of forcefield. The player's relatively tricky mission is to destroy that cannon by chipping holes in its defences. But blasting all the shielding away isn't the way to go since it'll regenerate if too much is destroyed; instead gaps have to be blasted through the three layers for shots to reach their target.

And to make things quite a bit harder there are enemy drones – some of which are indestructible – defending the fortress, and the cannon itself will fire on the player if it gets a clear shot through the gaps blasted in its shielding. Overall, *Stellar Fortress* is a slice of simple but entertaining coin-op inspired twitch gaming.





SUSHI CASTLE



» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/SUSHI-CASTLE-XBLIG

Ninjas are busy guys, always taking part in some kind of quest or fighting for a great cause. Take the star of *Sushi Castle*, for example, he's on an arcade-style dungeon crawl seeking vengeance… although the game's instructions are a little vague as to how he's been wronged! He's ready to take on anyone and everyone, though, starting off with a shoulder-mounted gun shaped like a dragon – aimed with the right thumb stick – in order to collect all manner of extra toys either dropped by killed enemies or found in chests and boxes.

There are 25 enemy types accompanied by 12 bosses and the order of the screens within each level is generated randomly so each game is different; by the third or fourth stage, things start to become challenging, but there are enough power-ups and extra lives dotted around to keep the mission manageable.

Sushi Castle offers a lot of territory to cover and a wry sense of humour to match the cartoon visuals; there's lots of foes to destroy and noodles to eat for the 80 Point price tag but one particularly nice idea is that, while there is an option from the menu for downloadable content, the developers are going to give it away to owners of the game. When specific sales targets are met, more enemies, locations and modes will be bolted on for free.




» Georg Rottensteiner


» Trevor Storey

HOMEBREW HEROES

GEORG "ENDURION" ROTTENSTEINER AND TREVOR "SMILA" STOREY ARE THE DEVELOPERS OF THE PLATFORMER SOULLESS ON THE C64, WHICH CAUGHT OUR ATTENTION IN THE PREVIOUS ISSUE. WE DECIDED TO TRY STANDING RIGHT IN FRONT OF THEM WHILE HOLDING UP ON THE JOYSTICK TO SEARCH FOR ANSWERS TO OUR QUESTIONS…

Q&A

What brought the two of you together to work on *Soulless*?
Georg Rottensteiner: It was mostly Trevor's idea. I asked him to work over the graphics for my *Supernatural* tutorial game. Which he did, and later came up with the idea to *Soulless*.
Trevor Storey: I did some art for Georg's game called *Supernatural*, then began playing with some ideas. I did a few mock-ups and asked Georg if he'd be interesting in doing it, he said yes and that was that.

And what would you say were your main inspirations behind the gameplay?
TS: I've always been a sucker for platform adventures and the C64 had some great ones. I loved *Impossible Mission*, so the gameplay is heavily inspired by that. We did come up with a much easier puzzle though, the one in *Impossible Mission* used to have me scratching my head.

Can you tell us if there were any particularly great or indeed painful moments during development?
GR: The most painful moment was when the whole game didn't fit into the 64K of the cartridge. I did lots of rearranging data around so Exomizer would pack better. The greatest moment, when it all finally worked from cartridge, with all three parts connected!
TS: When we first received the music from Mikkel and got it into the game is a good memory. That was the moment it all seemed to be coming together. Also when I did the intro and got to see it running for the first time. Doing the art and the rooms was pretty easy really; Georg had a lovely little editor which was very artist friendly and easy to use.

You ended up being published by Psytronik and RGCD at the same time! How did that come about?
GR: We'd been approached by Kenz (Psytronik) beforehand, and James was in there suddenly with the 64k cartridge idea. They both did and do a terrific job, and I hope we'll keep working together.
TS: We worked with Psytronik first doing the disk and cassette versions. If I remember correctly, James from RGCD approached Kenz from Psytronik and asked if he'd do a cartridge release.

***Soulless* was very impressive for a first project together, so do you have any plans for a sequel or perhaps another game together?**
GR: Several, actually. First on there's *Catnipped*, a *Bubble Bobble*-alike, and after that we have *Hyperion*, a *Metroid*-like game. I always wondered why the C64 never got something like that. *Knight 'n' Grail* was a grand game in that style rarely seen on the C64.
TS: I have an idea for a sequel but we have a few other games coming up before that happens. *Catnipped* is next, for two players. Then *Hyperion*, a fairly huge game with a big map and lots of collectables. The packaging I have in mind for that one is hopefully going to be huge too. We are also doing an entry for the 16K cartridge competition over at RGCD and hopefully get a proper release for *Supernatural* too. I've really enjoyed working with Georg, Kenz and James, so long may it continue…



» [C64] Why'd it have to be snakes?


» [C64] Work stages for the box art.


» [C64] Did I leave my keys here?


» [C64] How the comic looked during development.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

STAR LETTER

GRANDSTANDING, I MUST SAY

Hi guys,
I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed reading the Grandstand piece this month. Like all my favourite articles in **RG**, it took me straight back to my childhood and was a fascinating read, giving me some great insight into an area of gaming I previously knew very little about.

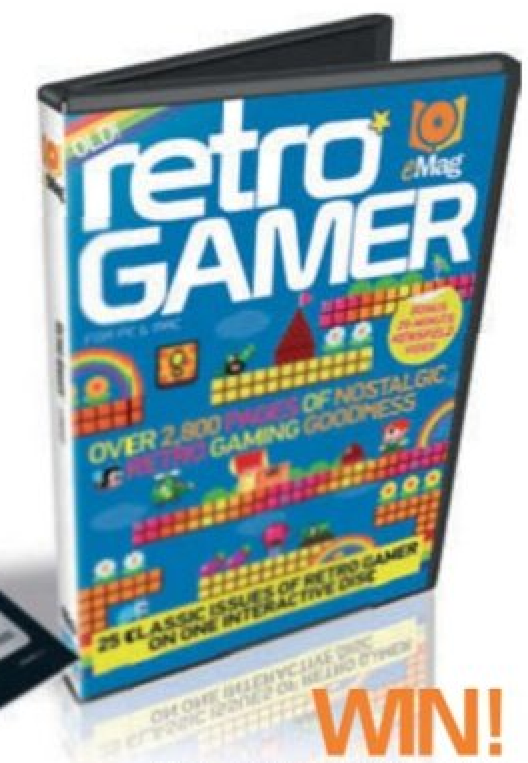
I remember owning a *Munchman* and *Astro Wars* back in the day and what I loved about them was that they were like owning mini arcade machines. I put a scary amount of hours (and batteries) into those games, so it was particularly pleasing to see *Astro Wars* make the cover and also that lovely two-page spread of all those Grandstand games.

Please can you run a follow-up article in the magazine that looks at other tabletop games that were released? Even if it's just a top 20 list or something.

Anyway, thanks for another cracking read, keep up the sterling work.
Sincerely,
Jason Pitt



Hi Jason,
We're pleased you enjoyed Rory's Grandstand feature, Jason. It went down really well with many readers on our forum. And while there's currently no plan for us to do another feature on tabletop arcade right now, it's certainly an area of gaming with more stories to tell. It's a topic you've not heard the last of…



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

TAKE COVER

Dear guys,
I am writing to have a bit of a moan. I've been buying **Retro Gamer** now, on and off (mostly on), for the past five years, and one of the things I love most about the magazine are the lovely cover treatments you guys do. My personal favourites over the years have been your stunning *Ant Attack* cover, that clever isometric chessboard one you did and pretty much anything by Oli Frey. To me the best **RG** covers have radiated fun, passion and a strong sense of nostalgia that is impossible to ignore, but the last few just haven't ticked these boxes for me. To be honest though, I would continue to buy the magazine even if you put a picture of a lump of margarine on your cover every month. I just wouldn't love it quite as much.
Gary Farrow

It's the features and content that dictate what goes on our cover, be it the celebration of a classic system or developer (EA), a classic game that is celebrating a special milestone (*Pong*) or an exclusive feature about and area of gaming previous undocumented (Grandstand). We think long and hard about what leads our cover and try out many different options before the final one is selected. Hopefully our next few covers will be more to your liking.



» Russell shows off his impressive Sega flooring. It's a shame Sega didn't release a few more games so he could finish the job.



» *Wreck-It Ralph* got Dean Rogers remembering videogames in movies, like *Wreck-It Street Fighter: The Movie* and *Wreck-It Super Mario Bros.*

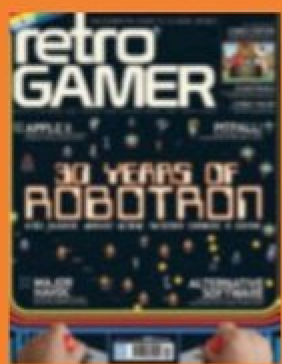
SHORT BUT SWEET

Hi there,
Big fan of your magazine. Here's a picture of my retro Sega collection. I really liked your feature on Atari a couple of months back and have always wanted to go "older school". I may give it a go (think my wife may divorce me though!).
Thanks
Russell Piper

Hi Russell, thanks for writing in and showing us your Sega collection. You made Darran turn Sonic-blue with envy.

AN OVERSEAS PERSPECTIVE

Hi,
I'm pretty sure I'm your target audience. I'm 34, bought at least one console per generation since the Atari 2600 (though I only buy a few iconic games per generation now) and have enough spare cash and motivation to have just imported three classic arcade machines from the US to Australia –



CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH2 6EZ
Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

>> YOUTUBE UPDATE



THIS MONTH WE'VE been spending a lot of time visiting Mark Bussler's Classic Game Room channel. It covers a wide variety of both retro and modern games, and Mark really knows his stuff. Search on Youtube for InecomCompany to track down his videos.

Pac-Man, *Donkey Kong* and *Track And Field*, if you're interested. But I am not British.

I'm sure you have stats on what part of your audience is from abroad, but I can tell you I've stopped being a regular purchaser or subscriber simply because EVERY issue seems to have great amounts of content devoted to the BBC, Spectrum, Amstrad, ST or some other system that was barely released anywhere but the UK. I still physically pick up every issue at the newsagent (distribution is a lot better these days which makes me think there's an audience) but after struggling to find anything but *Manic Miner* I've found myself putting it back. I used to read these articles and features and quite enjoyed them, but it is really hard to continue to be interested in something with very little nostalgia value outside of what I used to read about in *C&VG* or *Mean Machines*.

I know you probably get a lot of these types of emails but I really do wish about every second issue could have less of a UK focus. I'd probably buy them all if that was the case.
Thanks for listening
Peter

Peter, we are a British magazine and so invariably British computers do tend to receive a lot of love in the magazine. We've said this time and time again, but we cannot make a magazine to suit the tastes of a single person. What we try to do is to make each a balanced issue, considering the features that are pitched, reader comments and feedback. Speaking with British and US developers who worked on the Commodore, Amiga and Spectrum is also easier than tracking down Japanese developers.

RETRO CINEMA

Dear Retro Gamer,
Please could you write an article about videogames appearing in movies? Thanks to reading about and seeing the excellent trailer for Disney's upcoming animated movie *Wreck-It Ralph*, I've been casting my mind back to all the times classic games have appeared on celluloid. So far I can remember a *Star Wars* arcade machine appearing in *Gremlins*, a PC Engine GT being used in *Enemy Of The State*, and *Wild Gunmen* appearing in *Back To The Future Part II*. I'm sure there are plenty more and would love to see a feature in which you covered all the most notable examples in movies over the years.
Kindest regards,
Dean Rogers

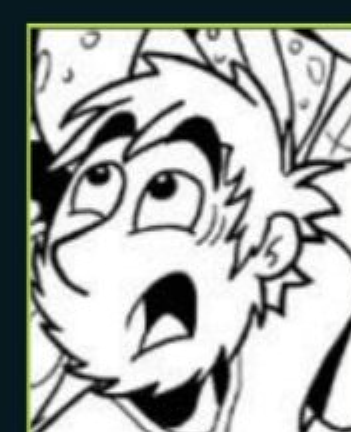
Hi Dean,
Thanks for the feature suggestion Dean. While there have been plenty of video games inspired turkeys over the years (*Street Fighter: The Movie*, *Super Mario Bros.*), there have also been some nice little nods and cameos from classic games and arcade machines too. To highlight them in one feature would make for an interesting read. We'll get on the case and see about putting something together.

D&PLEASE

Dear Darran,
Please can you run an article on *Dungeons & Dragons* games? There have been absolutely loads over the years, and I think an article on the subject is long overdue and would be particularly relevant with the upcoming release of *Baldur's Gate* on iPad. You could >>

> "I would love to see a feature covering all the most notable videogames in movies over the years"

RETROBATE PROFILE



Name:	Matt Boyer
Joined:	31 Jul 2012
Location:	London
Occupation:	VFX Artist
Website:	http:/twitter.com/aBigSwan
Fave Games System:	Sega Mega Drive



>> The Grandstand feature seems to have gone down swimmingly with many readers. Expect more of the like in future issues.

* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles

ROBOTRON: 2084

Eugene Jarvis and Larry DeMar created an enduring classic in *Robotron: 2084*, so we've been hammering it most lunch times to celebrate our new feature.



DARRAN'S ROBOTRON TIP

Always grab as many people as you can, because the score for each goes up by a 1,000 (with 5,000 being the cut-off). You can grab a lot of easy points this way.



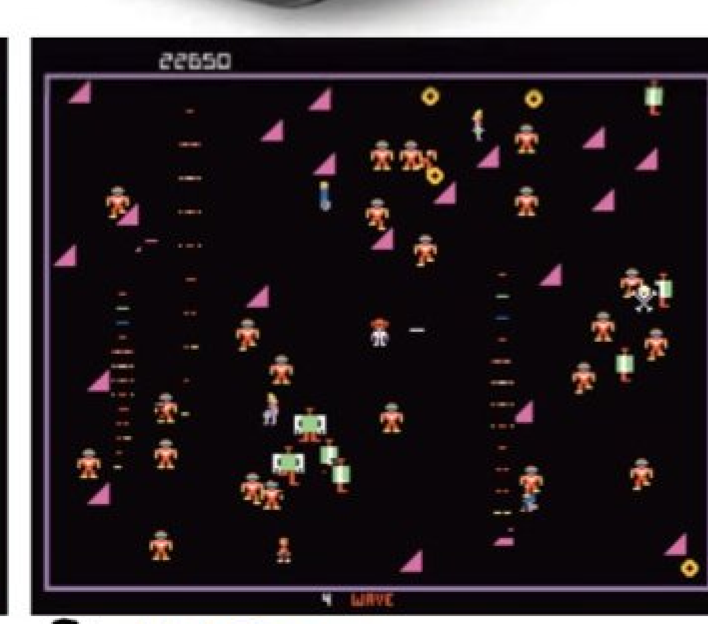
STUART'S ROBOTRON TIP

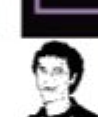
I'm worse than hopeless at *Robotron*, really bad. Therefore the very best advice I can give is to play it the opposite way to me. If I could tell you what that is you'd become world champion.





High Score: 214,550





High Score: 22,650

From The Forum Special

» Talk to us at www.retrogamer.net/forum

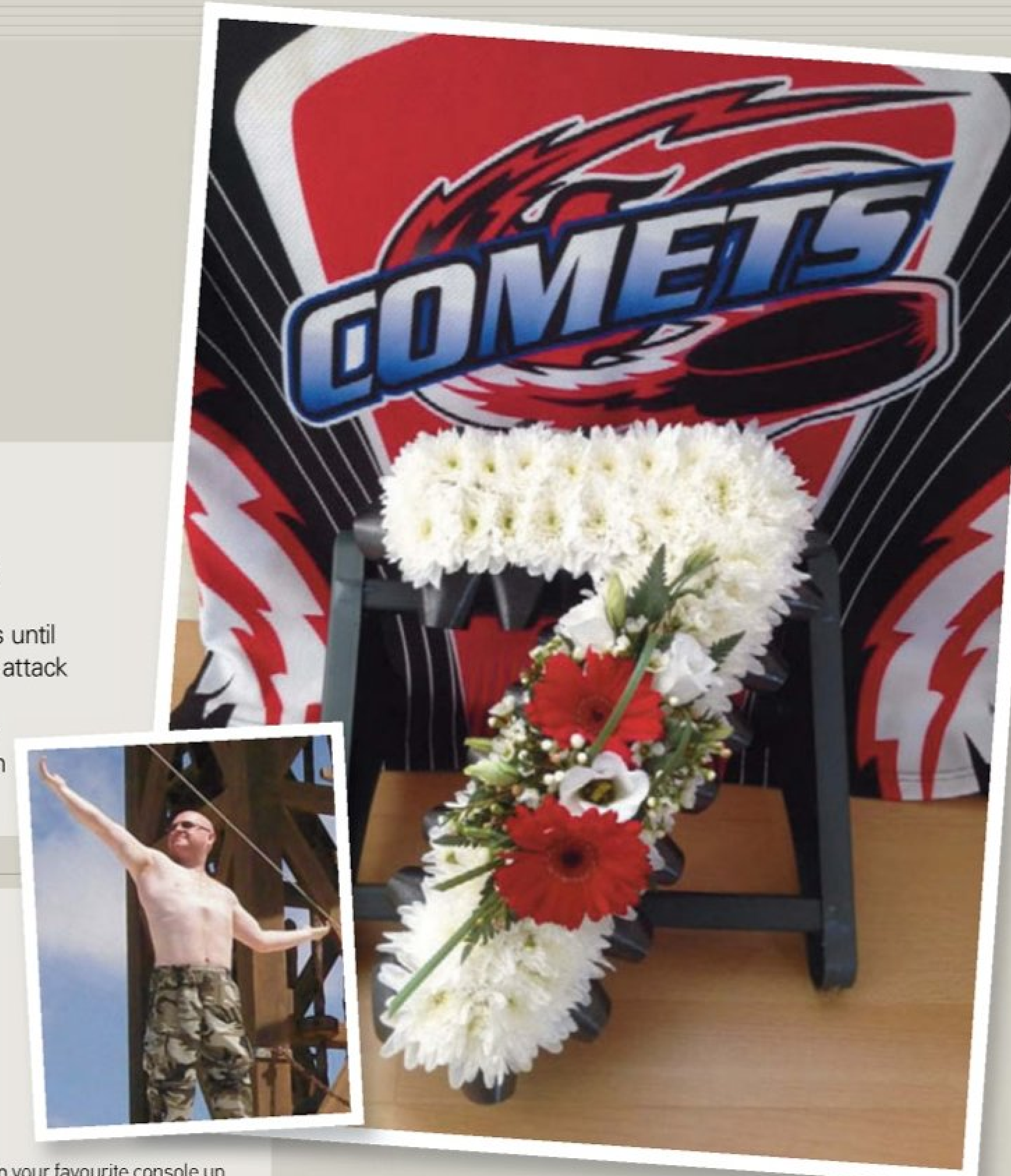


Image kindly supplied by Gavin's friend John North Chapman

Earlier this year saw the sad passing of regular reader and prominent forum member Gavin 'bsg' Crossling

Gavin was a valued member of the community and was always willing to help out other members and offer advice about gaming. He was particularly generous in our 'Random Niceness' thread, and would often give goodies away to others. A regular at retro events until his illness made it impossible for him to attend, sadly he passed away from a fatal heart attack on 25 July.

Here are just a few of the many messages that fellow readers left for him when they found out about the terrible news. Our thoughts go out to his friends and family. You can also pay your respects to Gavin by visiting http://gavin-crossling.gonetoosoon.org/.

crusto
Rip Gavin, condolences to all connected.

Smurph
While 'only' an internet acquaintance, I traded with Gavin many times - he became somewhat of a Vectrex supplier to me, getting me overlays that were missing from my collection.

He was a lovely bloke, who would always be pleasant to everyone on the forum. Great Youtube vids as well. He'll be sorely missed.

sscott
Very sorry to hear, condolences to all concerned.

Jagfest_UK
That is really sad. R.I.P.

dste
Awful news. Had a couple of chats through PMs and he always seemed like a nice and genuine guy. RIP bsg.

ToxieDogg
Like some others, I've known Gav for ages myself, spoke to him many times via PM, had him (well, still do) on my PSN friends list, he was also a large part of the old (now defunct) site I used to run.

Some of his thoughts and insights were comedy gold and I thought he was a top bloke. Very, very sad news. RIP mate.

Hitman_HalStep
He has been on my PSN list since not long after joining but we never really talked. Feels like a missed opportunity. RIP.

Antiriad2097
I'm both shocked and saddened to hear of this.

Stuart_c
Been an absolute age since I posted here but just heard the news and wanted to pop in and leave a message. Like many here I never met him, but we used to talk a lot on YouTube and he was always a decent guy to get along with.

It actually brought a tear or two to my eye reading through this thread. I use a few other sites regarding hobbies, but it has to be said that the gaming community are the kindest and most caring of them all. Great to hear about the fund set up.

RIP friend and don't think I've forgotten about your offer to try the "Naga Viper" with me, I'll bring some with me when we meet again.

LeeT
Was shocked to hear about Gav, only found out yesterday when I saw a few of the messages on his Facebook popping up.

I knew Gav through a friend and he used to come round and we would swap the latest C64 releases and talk about what was in the music charts at the time. Had many a good Saturday night out too.

RIP Gavin Crossling.

RetroRik
RIP bsg. Can't say I knew him but when somebody in the community you hang out in dies it kind of brings home that the real things in life that matter. Makes all the bickering and arguing over pointless things on an Internet forum seem so petty and childish in the end. I don't suppose it's possible to do some kind of tribute at the Manchester event? Even just a card signing for his family?

resident paul
This was a shock to me, and condolences to his surrounding family.

Dam
Poor guy. RIP bsg. Didn't he start the Xbox softmod kit-sharing thing on here? That was a really cool thing to do.

rossi46
That's terrible news. RIP big guy.

the_hawk
That's awful news, seemed like a really nice guy. I remember him posting about having some health problems, that's really, really sad to hear. As many have said it puts things in perspective, sympathies to all who knew him. RIP.

nokgod
Jeez. Had a few dealings with him, always seemed a nice guy. What a tragedy. RIP.

Greyfox
Only up as far as 22 July that bsg posted and three days later he was gone. Very sad indeed to hear this, I read a good few of his posts over here and he was always positive, and helpful.

It's a real shame we have lost a good member here, RIP Mr Crossling. I hope you're playing your favourite game on your favourite console up in heaven.

TwoHeadedBoy
RIP to bsg, this is really sad. I loved it when he had a big rant at the guy who was looking for a "definitive list of valuable games to look out for".

ipmarks
Very sad... He was somebody whose posts I always enjoyed reading.

markopoloman
What sad, sad news. RIP bsg. Just been reading through some of his old posts. Going to miss the 'Blow Me!' Nintendo cart avatar.

r0jaws
Unfortunately I never met the guy, he seemed like a decent sort, and I had a trade with him in the distant past. His "Blow Me!" avatar always made me smile. RIP big man, thoughts are with your family and friends.

retrosofer
This is sad news, I knew bsg from YouTube, always enjoyed his videos, and then discovered he was on here too when I joined up, top bloke.

He always gave this forum a mention in his videos, and always said it was a great place to trade with like-minded gamers, RIP dude.

BSG QUOTES

We've collected some of Gavin's best quotes from the forum for you all to enjoy.

***Big Trouble in Little China, Tango & Cash, Cobra, Phantasm, Fright Night, Wargames.* Ah well, there is my evening of movie watching set up.**
Recommended Eighties viewing

I've a *Catwoman* DLC code for the 360 version. It goes to the first person with a decent Batman joke :-)
Gavin always inhabited the Random Niceness thread

***Paranoid* never really floated my boat – even playing it now, I just feel no excitement or connection with the game...**
Gavin wasn't a fan of *Paradroid*

Excellent issue. It is probably my most favourite issue in the last year!
Gavin enjoyed issue 93

The Konix Speedking was... erm, the king... no other 'stick could withstand multiple plays of *LA 84*, or *Hypersports*...
Gavin's favourite joystick

concentrate on key games, like *Baldur's Gate* or *Planescape*, examine the popular gold box titles from the 16-bit period, or simply cover every single game that has ever been released (I think the first was on Intellivision?). I used to love playing the original role-playing game, and I'm sure many other readers were the same.
Kindest regards,
Ryan Gross

It something we've given some serious thought to. We know a freelancer who is working on a making-of *Planescape* right now, so watch this space.

ANARCHY IN THE UK

Hello Retro Gamers,

As a long time player whose love for anything 'new' in the gaming world dried up about five years ago and an obsessive in many ways of generations past, I was very interested to read your take on the Amiga PD scene, and seeing 17Bit Software in print again.

What really tickled my pickle though was your spin on the 'other side' of the PD Network, the Amiga demo scene, and, in particular your choices for the Top Five Amiga Demos. Well, you got four right. I'll give you that, even if you were a little biased giving *Spaceballs* two hits. But the Pink Floyd *The Wall* demo? Really? No, I mean… REALLY?

> "What really tickled my pickle were your choices for the Top Five Amiga Demos"

I suppose the PD shops would have loved it at the time, six disks = big money, but that's about it. But you forgot one home-grown 'legend', with too many hits to choose from: Anarchy. The British team that spread throughout Europe and into America between 1989 and 1993, outgunned everyone to become World No1 Demo Group in 1992/93, as voted for by the demo scene itself. Glorious works such as *Phantasmagoria, Seeing Is Believing, In The Kitchen, Delusions Of Reality.*

I know, you're a retro gaming magazine but you brought the demo scene into the mix, and any 'best of' chart is always going to be subjective, but *The Wall*? Really?

There is, however, a retro game-related layer to this grumble pie in the form of a lesser-known fact that many of today's game makers cut their teeth making such demos, many in parallel with their demo scene alter egos. Their earlier titles that are now themselves considered retro. Anarchy alone at the time had programmers and musicians working for Core Design, Reflections and Argonaut Software, to later directly work on the SuperFX chip that became such a large part of the Super Nintendo's latter years.

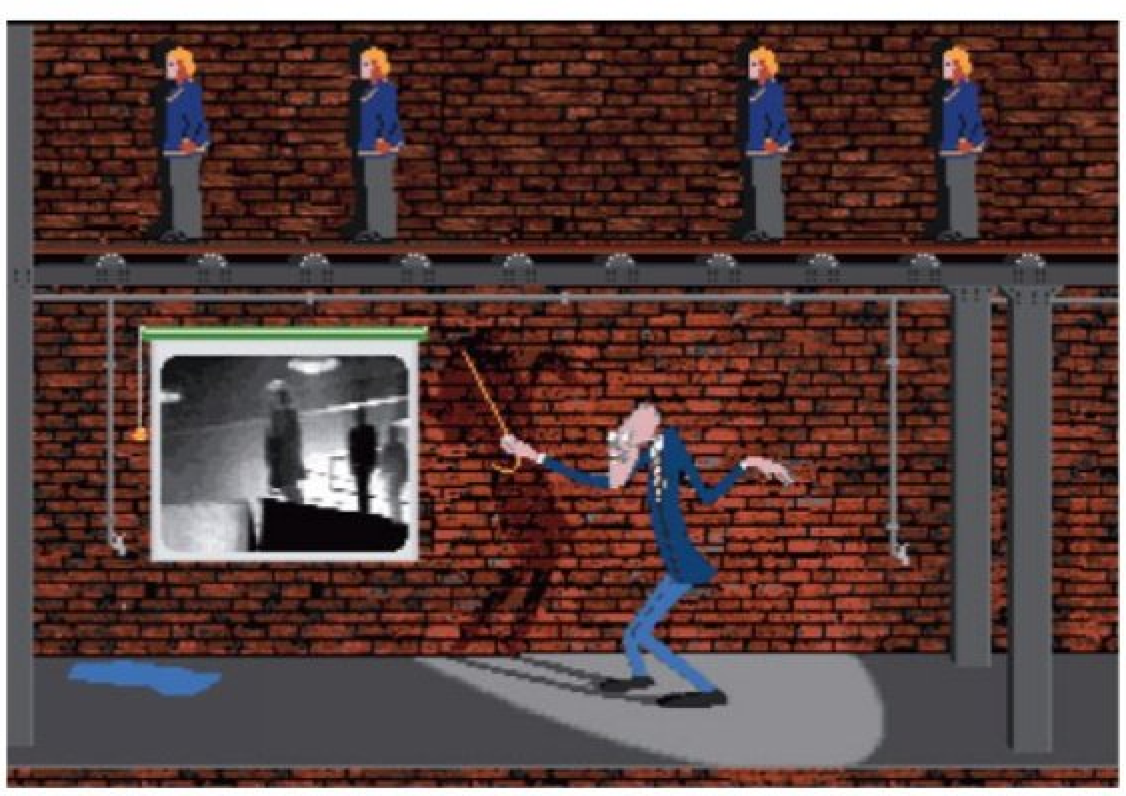
So, in the spirit of keeping the British end up, and keeping up the momentum of the Jubilee, an epic Olympics, and the 50th Anniversary of *James Bond* on the Silver Screen, remember the British demo group you forgot. Anarchy.
M. Hellewell

As you say, these lists are subjective, and to be fair to the freelancer who wrote the article, he was limited to just five demos. Picking titles for a definitive list from what was available was no easy task! With that said, thanks to us printing your letter this month we've given the Anarchy guys around seven times more coverage in the magazine than *The Wall* demo anyway.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Blur21

Both Darran and Stuart are anxiously awaiting the arrival of *Blur21*, the lustrous box set the band have just released which features bonus material as well as remastered albums. Darran's addictive personality has seen him order the set and start getting back into buying CDs. This has also led to him fishing out a guitar he had festering in his loft and consider taking lessons. At this rate, by next month he'll have changed his name to Graham Albarn and moved into a one-bed flat in south-east London.



[Amiga] One reader raises Anarchy after reading our Amiga shareware feature last month.

THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY… This issue's covers that nearly happened



DARRAN

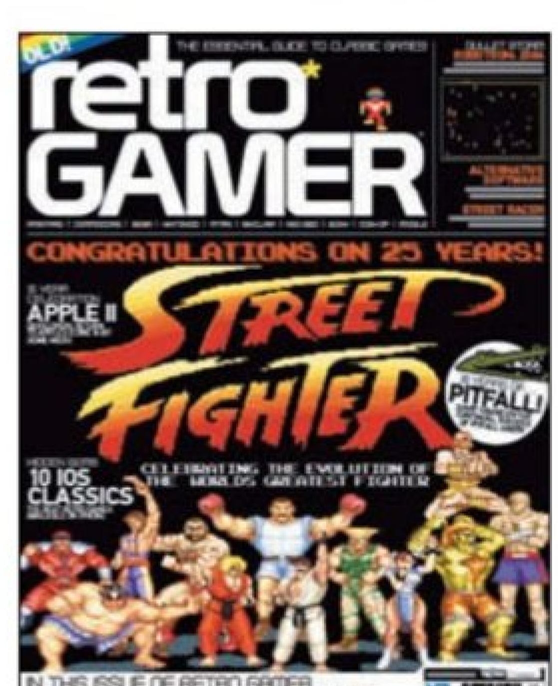
This was the very first design we put forward for a *Street Fighter* cover. The idea was to simulate a big fight, but one suggestion was that it looked more like a dance audition for *The X-Factor*. We dubbed it the *West Side Story* cover and quickly moved on.



STUART

This started off as the congratulations screen from the SNES port that flashed up when you completed the game. We swapped the SNES sprites out for arcade ones in the end, as they gave better clarity, but the *Street Fighter* logo kept dominating proceedings.





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DOOMED

As Doom 3 prepares to receive a brand new HD remake, John Carmack and John Romero revisit the original three games that defined a genre



MORE EXCITING FEATURES TO LOOK FORWARD TO NEXT ISSUE

Konix Multisystem

■ We speak to Konix fan Mark Campbell and discover how he's got his hands on the only known Konix prototype



Before videogames

■ Marty Goldberg documents our hobby, and reveals the systems from the Forties onwards that helped shape the industry we love

Shigeru Miyamoto

■ In a brand new series we take a look at the key industry legends that have helped shape gaming for the better

Psygnosis: 1984 - 2012

■ With Studio Liverpool now sadly closed, we pay tribute to the British developer, by looking at the key games it published



Final Fantasy

■ Square developers reveal their favourite moments, while we document every game in the series

Renegade

■ Yoshihisa Kishimoto reveals the origin of his iconic arcade game, while Mike Lamb reveals how he converted it to home systems

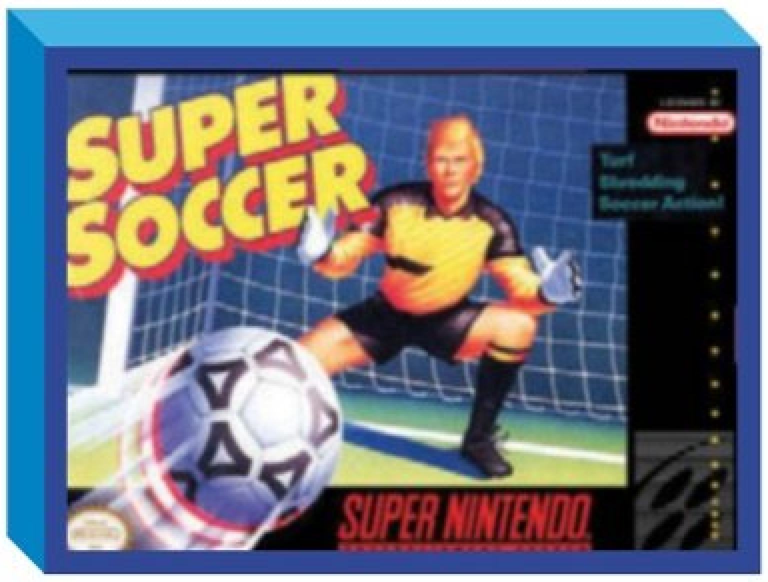


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ENDGAME



SUPER SOCCER

» Football game endings tend to be pretty forgettable. Usually they just reward footy skills with a few words of congratulations, a picture of a giant gold trophy, or, if you're really lucky, a moving image of your team celebrating their newfound footy glory. As we explained in issue 105 though, Super Soccer dared to do something a bit different, messing with our emotions and the rules of the beautiful game.



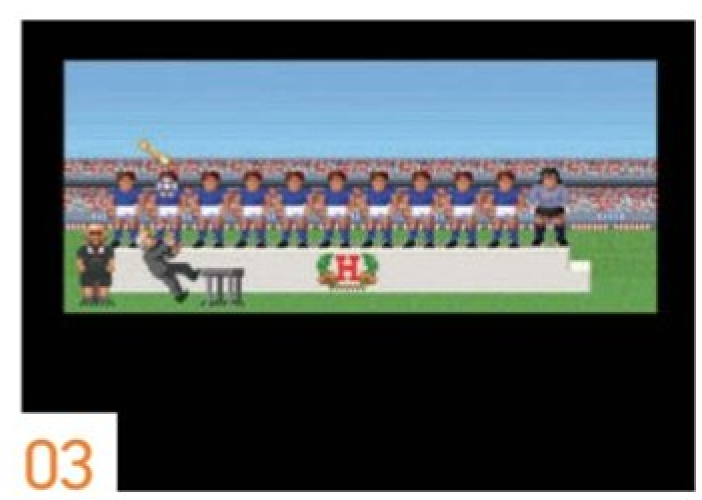
01

» With seconds to go the ball is kicked out for a throw-in. Italy's slowest player Ezislo Cemento slowly makes his way towards the sideline to slowly pick up the ball before slowly turning his head to see which teammate can throw the ball too.



02

» Though not the most convincing of wins, Italy beats Germany to become world champions. The team line up on the winner's podium, ready to receive their trophy. It's an emotional day but one that is about to take a turn for the bizarre.



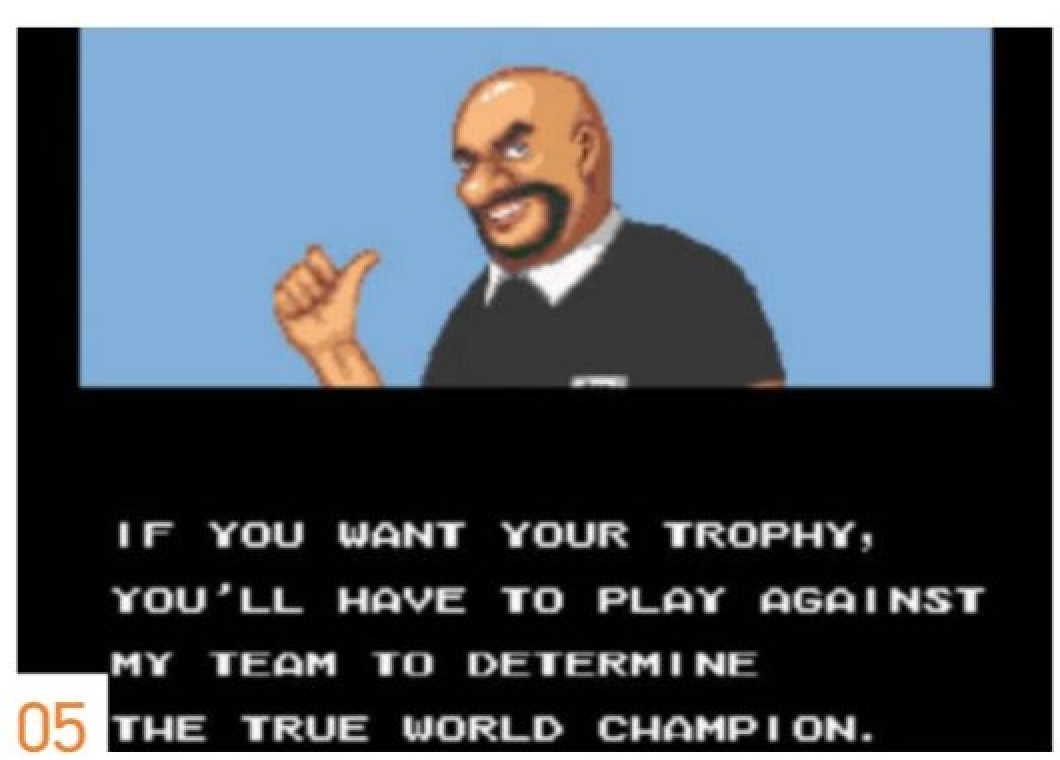
03

» A loud thud, the sound of a foot hitting ball leather, is heard off camera. Seconds later, the FIFA president is lying unconscious and the trophy is in the air. The players watch in amazement as these events unfold before their very eyes.



04

» The players are frozen. Fifteen minutes pass before they come round. The ref's run off with the trophy and is giggling like an evil drunk crazy clown who has just witnessed something stunningly hilarious. Three players jump down and start to take chase.



05

» Cornered, he decides that Italy beat his team, who haven't played qualifiers or group stage matches, to be world champions in the eyes of… well, just him, really. Italy phones the police, the ref's arrested and the players celebrate with a soapy bath.



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